

THE
FAMILY INSTRUCTOR;
OR, A
REGULAR COURSE
OF
Scriptural Readings!
WITH
FAMILIAR EXPLANATIONS
AND
PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS,
ADAPTED TO THE PURPOSE OF
DOMESTIC AND PRIVATE EDIFICATION,
FOR EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

BY JOHN WATKINS, LL. D.

That nation must always be powerful where every man performs his duty,
and every man will perform his duty that considers himself as a being, whose
condition is to be settled to all eternity by the laws of Christ.

DR. JOHNSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS

OF THE

THIRD VOLUME.

	<i>Page.</i>
INTRODUCTION - - - -	3
<i>Day.</i> SEPTEMBER.	
1. The Divine Logos - - -	23
2. The Annunciation - - -	26
3. The Birth of John - - -	30
4. The Name of Jesus - - -	33
5. The Nativity - - -	37
6. The Circumcision - - -	42
7. The Epiphany - - -	44
8. The Song of Simeon - - -	48
9. The Holy Innocents - - -	52
10. The Childhood of Jesus - - -	55
11. The Ministry of John - - -	58
12. The Baptism of Jesus - - -	62
13. The Temptation - - -	63
14. Calling of the Disciples - - -	63
15. The Marriage in Cana - - -	72
16. Purging of the Temple - - -	76
17. Character of Nicodemus - - -	79
18. The Testimony of John - - -	84
19. The Woman of Samaria - - -	87
20. The Bigoted Nazarenes - - -	91
21. The Draught of Fishes - - -	95

<i>Day.</i>		<i>Page.</i>
22.	The Sermon on the Mount - -	98
23.	The same - -	102
24.	The same - -	106
25.	The Leper cleansed - -	111
26.	The Believing Centurion - -	114
27.	The Tempest stilled - -	117
28.	The Gadarene Demoniacs - -	121
29.	The Case of the Paralytic - -	126
30.	The Issue of Blood - -	131

OCTOBER.

1.	Infidelity of the Jews - -	135
2.	The Mission of the Apostles - -	140
3.	The Widow's Son restored - -	144
4.	The Message of John - -	148
5.	The Penitent Woman - -	153
6.	The Pool of Bethesda - -	157
7.	The Sabbath sanctified - -	162
8.	The Unpardonable Sin - -	166
9.	The Danger of Apostasy - -	171
10.	The Parabolical Sermon - -	175
11.	The Death of John - -	179
12.	The Multitude fed - -	184
13.	Jesus in the Storm - -	189
14.	The Woman of Canaan - -	193
15.	The Confession of Peter - -	198
16.	Necessity of the Cross - -	203
17.	The Transfiguration - -	207
18.	The Tribute-money - -	213
19.	On causing Offences - -	217
20.	The Duty of Forgiveness - -	222

CONTENTS.

v

<i>Day.</i>		<i>Page.</i>
21.	The Evil of Scepticism - -	226
22.	On the Conduct of Jesus - -	231
23.	The Power of Truth - -	235
24.	The Woman taken in Adultery -	239
25.	On Faith in Christ - -	243
26.	The Man born blind - -	248
27.	On Intemperate Zeal - -	252
28.	The Kingdom of Darkness - -	256
29.	The Good Samaritan - -	260
30.	Martha and Mary - -	264
31.	On the Miracles - -	268

NOVEMBER.

1.	On the Lord's Prayer - -	272
2.	The Rich Sensualist - -	276
3.	The Prodigal Son - -	280
4.	The Unjust Steward - -	284
5.	The Rich Man and the Beggar -	287
6.	The same - -	292
7.	The Ten Lepers - -	295
8.	The Raising of Lazarus - -	298
9.	The Pharisee and Publican - -	303
10.	The Little Children - -	308
11.	The Young Ruler - -	312
12.	Parable of the Labourers - -	317
13.	Blind Bartimeus - -	320
14.	Conversion of Zaccheus - -	324
15.	The Entry into Jerusalem - -	327
16.	The Barren Fig-tree - -	330
17.	The Marriage Feast - -	334
18.	The Wedding Garment - -	337

<i>Day.</i>		<i>Page.</i>
19. The Widow's Offering	- -	340
20. The Fate of Jerusalem	- -	343
21. The Second Advent	- - -	347
22. The Last Judgment	- -	351
23. The Treachery of Judas	- -	354
24. The Last Supper	- -	358
25. The Humility of Christ	- -	360
26. The Confidence of Peter	- -	363
27. The Mansions of Bliss	- -	367
28. Union with Christ	- -	369
29. Spiritual Peace	- -	372
30. The Prayer of Christ	- -	376

DECEMBER.

1. The Agony in the Garden	- -	379
2. The Apprehension of Jesus	- -	382
3. The Trial of Jesus	- -	385
4. The Fall of Peter	- -	389
5. The Majesty of Christ	- -	393
6. Pilate and Herod	- -	396
7. Condemnation of Jesus	- -	399
8. The Crucifixion	- -	402
9. The Penitent Thief	- -	406
10. The Centurion's Confession	- -	409
11. The Water and Blood	- -	412
12. The Resurrection	- -	415
13. The Journey to Emmaus	- -	419
14. Incredulity of Thomas	- -	423
15. The Divine Commission	- -	427
16. The Ascension	- -	431
17. Descent of the Holy Ghost	- -	434

CONTENTS.**vii**

<i>Day.</i>		<i>Page.</i>
18.	Counsel of Gamaliel - - -	439
19.	Death of Stephen - - -	443
20.	The Ethiopian Convert - - -	447
21.	Conversion of St. Paul - - -	451
22.	Character of Cornelius - - -	455
23.	Deliverance of Peter - - -	459
24.	Paul and Barnabas - - -	463
25.	Paul Preaching at Athens - - -	466
26.	The Ephesian Converts - - -	471
27.	Conspiracy of the Jews - - -	474
28.	Paul before Felix - - -	477
29.	Confession of Agrippa - - -	482
30.	Shipwreck of St. Paul - - -	487
31.	The Improvement of Time - - -	491

INTRODUCTION

"THE Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ Jesus, who is the only Mediator between God and man." This Article of the Church marks in clear terms the point of unity where the two great branches of revelation meet, and from whence alone they derive all their authority and importance. The centre of both is the knowledge of the true God in the person of the Redeemer, who is the messenger of the covenant ordained from eternity for the remission of sins, and the restoration of fallen man to holiness and immortality. We have been hitherto employed in a regular examination of the stupendous apparatus, framed by Infinite Wisdom for the introduction of this great mystery, from the issuing of the decree that the dominion of evil should be destroyed, to the completion of prophecy in the annunciation of Him who is the desire of nations and the Jehovah of the Jewish temple. The call of Abraham renewed and defined the sentence delivered in Paradise; and the long period of trial that passed before the birth of the Heir of promise, represented the various steps and seasons destined to precede the fullness of time in which the "Sun of righteousness was to arise with healing in his wings." Mal. iv. 2. The whole history of that great patriarch was a typical description of the same glorious object, as appeared most remarkably in the command to offer his son as a sacrifice upon

Mount Moriah, the ready obedience of both parties to this awful injunction, and the resurrection of the victim from the funeral pile on the third day after the sentence of death had been passed upon him. In that wonderful scene the father of the faithful beheld the day of the Lord with gladness, and he expressed his joy in the predictive name imposed upon the spot where the whole was transacted, saying, "In this mount Jehovah shall be seen." Gen. xxii. 14. The descent of the tribes into Egypt, and their hard condition in that house of bondage, aptly figured the consequences of the fall, while the deliverance of the chosen people, by the visible interposition of the Deity, as strongly indicated the emancipation of mankind from the tyranny of their spiritual enemy and restoration to life and happiness. The ineffable Majesty who spoke from the flaming bush was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; the same who appeared on various occasions to those inspired persons, selected from the rest of the world that they might be the depositaries of the promise, and to make known the "coming of Shiloh, unto whom were to be gathered all the peoples." Gen. xlix. 10. This descended Deity, who revealed himself in particular places and under various forms, became the leader and instructor of Israel, to whom also he imparted a body of statutes peculiarly fitted to their state, and an ecclesiastical institution full of mystical rites and emblematical ordinances. So enigmatical indeed was the whole legal system of the Jewish polity, that without supposing it to have had a reference to some recondite sense and distant object, every part must have been both extremely burthensome and perplexing. The ceremonial ritual was of such a nature as to require an interpretation to render it beneficial to those who lived under the obligation of its rules; for if the worshipper had been without any other idea of his duty, or concern in these regu-

lations and restrictions, than what arose from the necessity of observing them, the most scrupulous practice would have been merely mechanical labour; and the longest life spent in such services would rather have excited pity than admiration. But nothing can be more unjust than to suppose that the Author of this dispensation, sanctioned as it was by miracles, should ordain a system without communicating the reasons on which it was founded, or making known the leading design of its peculiar formalities. Religion, to be efficacious, must be understood; but if it is clouded with inexplicable symbols, it can be considered as no better than a dead letter, with regard to any beneficial purposes for the direction of life and the improvement of the understanding. The law, as given by the hand of Moses, was imperfect, as it was only the shadow of good things to come: but then, as the shadow exhibits a correct outline of some substantial body interposed between the observer and the light; so the Levitical establishment, in all its parts, presented an exact sketch of the blessing to be made manifest in the day of redemption. There was no other difference between the believers of old, who feasted upon their sacrifices, and the disciples of a crucified Lord, who trust for their justification to faith in his atonement, than what is occasioned by the mere difference of time and of the forms in which they respectively contemplated the same salvation. Every part of the Mosaic economy was therefore a symbolical prediction, which directed the pious mind to the promised Seed, who at the era appointed was to bring life and immortality to light, and "in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed." According to the dying declaration of the Jewish legislator, the institution settled by his ministry was to be of temporary duration, and to cease on the coming of another Prophet, acting as he did, and enforcing his laws by Divine authority. The oracles

relating to this Divine Person were so numerous and explicit, that the worshippers in the temple could be at no loss for the meaning of the services at which, on certain solemn occasions, they were obliged to assist. The prophecies illustrated the performances of the sanctuary, by showing the dignity and humiliation of the Messiah, the efficacy of his death as an atonement for sin, and the certainty of eternal life procured for all believers by his resurrection. It is true, that the predictions of redemption by a mediator, are blended with many others which relate to the political condition of states long since extinct; but even these descriptions, however local and partial they may seem, had an incidental connexion with the promise of a Saviour, by showing the operations of Providence in disposing the world for his reception. The certainty of his coming was made evident by the accomplishment of what had been denounced against extensive cities and formidable kingdoms, in whose fate, so precisely foretold at a time when they were strong and towering, without any signs of decay, the astonished observer might see the immutability of the Divine decrees, and be comforted under the apparent delay of Him who was the desire of nations and the hope of Israel. The vicissitudes experienced by the descendants of Jacob, and the revolutions of which they were the witnesses, must be considered as instrumental to the gracious design of spreading abroad the oracle that unveiled the fate of empires, and announced a reign that never shall have an end. But for this circulation of the Inspired Writings, which foretold the incarnation of the Mighty One, it would be very difficult to account for the rapid propagation of Christianity in so short a space, even aided as it was by the indefatigable zeal and supernatural powers of its first preachers. When we reflect upon the rooted obstinacy of national prejudices, especially in what concerns ancient customs and religious opinions,

nothing can be conceived more extraordinary than the sudden alteration which took place among the most polished Pagans, in the renunciation of polytheism, with all its splendid machinery, its fascinating ceremonies, and voluptuous indulgences, for a simple faith, an unadorned worship, and an abstemious course of life. Though miracles, no doubt, contributed greatly to this change, yet the effect of those signs must have been limited among nations who readily ascribed all such operations to magical influence. Believing, as they did, that their own divinities had frequently appeared upon earth, and that by their direction particular persons were enabled to controul the powers of nature, the people of Greece and Rome would hardly, upon the bare exhibition of such marvellous sights as the healing of diseases and the infliction of judgments, have abandoned the creed of their fathers, with all its pompous observances, to embrace the doctrine of the cross, which brought upon those who professed it the charge of apostasy and the bitterness of persecution. Yet the fact is incontestible, that the most enlightened of the heathen world did, in an age of literary elegance and acute inquiry, forsake the temples of their gods and the schools of philosophy, to worship a crucified Saviour, and to sit at the feet of a few obscure fishermen. Now the lectures of these strangers were so completely founded upon the Sacred Book of the Hebrews, that an acquaintance with those Scriptures was indispensibly necessary to the right understanding of the Gospel. That there was a Divine Person born in Judea, who, after performing the most wonderful actions and exercising the greatest benevolence, suffered an ignominious death through the infidelity and ingratitude of his countrymen, might easily obtain belief, and even the fact of his resurrection was so attested as to deserve serious attention and respect; but the reason of all this could

not be comprehended without an examination of the ancient Scriptures, which contained the record of man's ruin and the promise of his recovery. Here they who felt the grievous burden of sin, and were anxious to know the means of salvation, had correct information concerning the origin of their malady and the remedy ordained for it, in the immolation of the spotless Victim slain, according to the Divine councils, from before the foundation of the world. The covenant of life, thus revealed, was confirmed and explained at sundry times by inspired men, who were also empowered to describe the future condition of the world and the several stages of its improvement, preparatory to the final establishment of the kingdom of righteousness. By the good providence of God in secretly disposing the hearts of men to the furtherance of his purposes, while they think only of their own gratification, an accurate translation of the Holy Scriptures was made at the command of a heathen king; so that the learned and inquisitive were put in possession of these treasures, and had abundant opportunities of comparing the word of prophecy with the evidences of facts and experience. This Greek version was well known to the ancients, and the effects produced by it must have been considerable in opening the way of the Gentiles, and preparing them for the truth as it is in Jesus. When the bearers of the Gospel message appealed to the living oracles, in testimony of what they were authorized to deliver, it must have been with the full persuasion that their auditors had the power of judging for themselves, by searching the Scriptures to discover the proofs alleged, and to consider the justice of the application that was made of them. The gift of tongues was indeed enjoyed by those who were called to the evangelical office, and the qualification was necessary to fit them for communicating with those who were ignorant of the Sacred

Writings in the original text. Yet we find the Apostles, in their addresses to the gentile converts, citing the ancient oracles freely, and even explaining the typical sense of the legal institutions as matters to which those believers were no strangers, and with which they could not have been acquainted but through the medium of the historical and prophetic books, as they stand in the canon of Inspiration. Thus were the Gentiles prepared for that light which illuminates the world with the knowledge of redemption, and thus did they profit by what was imparted to them; while the people who enjoyed the Holy Volume in its native state, perverted the sense of their positive institutions, and misapplied the oracles concerning the Messiah to the narrow and unworthy object of temporal conquest and a splendid reign. But in all this the prophetic descriptions were realized, and the opposite character of the two great classes into which mankind were distributed at that period, corresponded literally with what had been expressly and repeatedly foretold. Among the heathen who attended ingenuously to the preaching of the Apostles, and carefully examined the Divine records, which in various forms shadowed and predicted the glad tidings now fully revealed, the doctrine of redemption spread with prodigious swiftness, and the moral revolution was soon apparent in the altered manners of those who embraced the faith of Christ. The unconverted Jews, on the other hand, became more gloomy and bigoted, turbulent and seditious, after rejecting the offered blessing, and despitefully treating the covenant of mercy; so that by their infidelity the law proved a dead letter, and the volume of prophecy was to them a sealed book. While the believing Gentiles improved in faith and holiness, the state of Israel declined in religion and morals, till the Roman government, provoked by the factious outrages committed in Judea, made a terrible

example of that country, and put an utter end to its civil and ecclesiastical polity. It would be very easy to prove that these different effects were owing to the manner in which the Scriptures were treated by the people who received the glad tidings with great joy, and those who rejected the heavenly Messenger, because he did not come armed with earthly power and clothed in all the pomp and splendour of royalty.

The Jewish community was at that period divided into two leading parties, distinguished by very opposite principles: the first, who were the most considerable, admitted the whole Old Testament to have been given by inspiration; but these PHARISEES vacated the law and the prophets, to make room for frivolous distinctions and unmeaning ceremonies, which rendered piety needless, by taking away the spirit of religion, and substituting mechanical services for holy obedience. Thus the written word was made subject to the decisions of proud and hypocritical teachers, who exalted human traditions and contrivances, in the popular estimation, to an equality at least with the sacred text. But there were many whose disposition and habits could ill submit to the restrictions imposed by the Pharisaic rule, and who mingled too much with the world to bend their inclinations under an arbitrary yoke, which had no pretensions to a Divine sanction. The SADDUCEES, however, as these free-thinkers were called, did not openly attack the established religion, by denying the authority of Moses, or calling in question the sacred origin of his code, but they rendered the whole of no effect, by setting aside the awful sanction of a future state. These sceptics manifested no peculiar zeal to obtain followers, nor were they, like their opponents, rigid persecutors of those who differed from them: but they contributed equally with the Pharisees to undermine the foundations of the state, by poisoning the principles and destroying the morals of the

people. Prophecy was with them at the most but an uncertain subject, and the doctrine of an immaterial substance a mere philosophical speculation, or rather the pleasing dream of credulous minds, embodying the illusions of hope and giving reality to the apprehensions of fear. With such low notions of the Scripture, and unworthy ideas of its Divine Author, it is no wonder that these Jewish Epicureans should have regarded the resurrection as a fable, and the doctrine of spiritual intelligences as no better than the fond delusions of the imagination. Matter being evidently the deity of these infidels, it was natural for them to resolve all events into the fortuitous contingency of second causes; thus rejecting Providence from the government of the universe, and releasing men from every kind of responsibility for their actions. Under such rulers and teachers, for the Sadducees as well as the Pharisees were admitted to the highest offices, the moral character of the people could hardly fail to be greatly contaminated, while their religious profession consisted either in empty forms, or was reduced to absolute indifference. This was the condition of Judea when the appointed Saviour came to fulfill the law and to verify the prophecies; to make the Divine will generally known, and to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. That this should be called the fullness of time, and that in so corrupt and dark a generation the Messiah should choose to display his power and to proclaim his doctrine, may seem unaccountable; and contrary to what human wisdom would have selected as the most proper season and stage for the appearance of Him who was to establish a universal kingdom and to bring in everlasting righteousness. But it had been foretold of the Redeemer, that he should so come, and it was necessary for the very purposes of his mission, which were to make an atonement for transgression by suffering an ignominious death, and

to rise again, that all his faithful followers might obtain eternal life. The Mosaic economy was to be taken away, as being no longer of any use after the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh; but it was necessary that in him the typical predictions should be realized by the shedding of his blood, otherwise the figures of the law would have wanted an explanation, and the declarations of the prophets have failed of accomplishment. Sinful man might have been abandoned to the consequences of his disobedience, and the whole race left to the degraded situation in which the seduction of the adversary had placed them, without any injury to the Divine government, or any sensible loss being perceived in the immensity of intellectual being. But Infinite Wisdom and Mercy ordained salvation for the fallen creatures, in the person of one who, at the appointed time, was to take upon him human nature, to obey with the utmost exactness every precept of the law, to pay the full forfeit of our crimes, and to satisfy by his death the demands of eternal justice. •To fulfill these objects the Messiah came in an age most adapted to the arduous and painful cause which he had undertaken, and among a people so degenerate as to stand in need of an extraordinary teacher, who was certain of experiencing no other reward for his labours than obloquy and persecution. Besides, in the mystery of redemption, the early conversion of the Gentiles was indispensibly requisite to the spreading of the Gospel among all nations. But if the Jews had not rejected the offered grace, and sealed their own condemnation by rebellion, this end would have been attained by slow degrees. Though the predictive descriptions of the Redeemer and his kingdom might indeed have received an exact fulfillment by other means, if the Almighty had so determined, yet the most scrupulous judgment cannot but admire the wonderful excellence of that wisdom

which over-ruled the unbelieving spirit and wicked combinations of men, to the completion of the Divine plans and the diffusion of general good. It deserves serious attention, and is of great importance in the investigation of this subject, that the Gentiles were not to embrace Judaism as a preliminary to their admission into the new covenant. On the contrary, all the prophecies relating to the Messiah's kingdom, describe it as most ample in extent and liberal in its privileges, freely bestowing its blessings upon all nations, without any exception; and so far from confining the altar, or seat of unity, to Jerusalem, or any other spot, declaring "that in every place incense should be offered to the Divine name, and a pure offering." Mal. i. 11. Now to effect this magnificent object, it was proper that the Jewish polity should be taken down, and the temple service annulled, as being too narrow and particular for such a purpose, because, if old things had remained unchanged, the ritual of Moses must have become the rule of worship, which would have proved an intolerable burthen to many people, and in some respects could not have been practised alike over all the earth.

The Hebrew legislator himself affirmed, that his authority was to be superseded by that of another Teacher and Prophet, whose law should be fixed, and of universal obligation. When, therefore, the sacred canon of Hebrew Scripture was completed, and the word of prophecy ceased in the Jewish church, this declaration of Moses ought to have prepared the people for the advent of their Lord, and for that change of administration which had been so clearly and repeatedly predicted. But though the Messiah was indeed the object of desire, yet, by a strange fatuity, the Jews would not submit to any alteration of their institution, nor renounce the additions with which it

had been encumbered by the inventions of men. The consequence of this perverseness was the destruction of their political state, the utter subversion of their hierarchy, and the complete dispersion of the infatuated nation, as monumental witnesses of the truth of prophecy and of the just judgment of God upon them for their impenitence and infidelity. In this corruption of the seed of Jacob, and the sifting of them among those from whom they wished to be for ever separated as a peculiar inheritance, the gentile converts had a striking proof of the Divine interposition in human affairs, and of the wisdom of God, who directs even the obdurate malice and perverse machinations of the wicked to the advancement of his plans and the fulfillment of his promises. .

Now, as this vast design of raising man from his degraded condition, and of bringing him to the Divine favour through an intercessor, could not possibly have been known without a special communication from heaven, it follows that another revelation was necessary to show the steps taken to carry the scheme into effect, and to determine the time and manner of performance. The declaration that a Saviour should come in the fullness of time, would have afforded little satisfaction to those concerned in his appearance, if they had been left destitute of information by which they might be guided with certainty to the great object of their faith and expectation. The believers of old, while the Mosaic dispensation subsisted, were comforted in the hope of the promised blessing by the representations given of it in the shadows of the law; but when that system came to an end, and the fire of the altar was extinguished, the people had nothing more to look for but the completion of all the prophecies in the full establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. As this abolition of the preparatory institution was a clear indication that the design of it had been fully

answered by the coming of the Person represented, a detailed narrative of that event became absolutely necessary to prove the fulfillment of the prophecies. Indeed without such a completion of revelation, it is obvious that the original promise of a deliverer must, at a greater distance, have been very faint and unimpressive. The New Testament is therefore essential to the perfection of the Hebrew Scriptures, and these again are equally necessary to the right understanding of what is contained in the Gospels. The one, in short, is a record proving the actual performance of an engagement, and the other exhibits a specification of the grounds, objects, and benefits of that covenant, with the nature, dignity, and operations of the Person by whom it is executed. Here, then, it is evident that nothing short of plenary inspiration could be adequate to the determination of this important fact, that the Messiah is come, and that in Him who bore that character all the predictions were so fully and unequivocally verified as to render any other application of them weak and insufficient. The writers employed to detail the proceedings of God, in bringing to pass his revealed decrees, must have been kept by the Spirit of truth from all possibility of error in what they related, equally as much as the prophets were in what they foretold. If the case had been otherwise, whatever credit might be due to the veracity of the Evangelists as reporters, if the matters stated by them were out of the ordinary course of things, some doubt would be entertained of the judgment and sagacity of the historians. Two of these were indeed constant attendants of the wonderful Person, whose life and discourses they have narrated; but even with the advantages derived from such a connexion, and the certainty that there could be no inducement in these witnesses to impose a fable upon the world, Divine knowledge was requisite to esta-

blish the important fact, that the ancient oracles concerning the redemption of man were now accomplished, and that no further expectation was to be formed upon the subject. The predictive Scriptures being certainly divine, the historical records which attest their accomplishment must be manifestly of the same authority, because they form the most decisive part of the evidence, and either settle the matter beyond all doubt, or keep it open to endless inquiry. The differences that strike the eye in the evangelical narratives, and the uncertainty attending the order in which the Gospels were written, can be no more a reasonable objection to these sacred productions, than the variety of style and representation used in foretelling the Messiah can be considered as throwing any obscurity on that article of faith by weakening the character of the prophets. The evangelists, it is true, have not scrupulously adhered to chronological arrangement, and some particulars are mentioned by one on which the others are silent; but these discrepancies, so far from affecting the truth of the story or lessening the high reputation of the writers, will be found, on an impartial examination, to have quite the contrary effect. If in the promulgation of Christianity there had been any intention to deceive the world, and particularly to ensnare the credulous into the zeal of proselytism, the managers of the design would have avoided all separate relations tending to injure the cause in which so many were embarked, and which they must know could only be maintained by consistency and uniformity. In contriving to support their credit, the first consideration would have been the necessity of keeping closely to one settled and well-digested account, as well with regard to the facts asserted as the order of time when they were said to have happened. But even had they been merely the honest reporters of what was firmly believed by themselves, yet having no other

than human testimony for these things, the writers would have been cautious of stating particulars of their religion and its Founder, which were not contained in the accounts already published. Supposing the system, then, to have been the result of a concerted plan, no difference of this sort would have occurred, for the interest of the parties engaged in the scheme required another course of proceeding; and any narrative drawn up by an individual, without authority, the community must have rejected in strong terms, when it was found to state new particulars of importance concerning the Author of their faith. The differences of the four Gospels were therefore evidently such as proceeded from design; but it was in the wise appointment of the Divine Author, not that of the persons employed to record the history of Jesus. A single narrative might have led men to presume that the first preachers of Christianity had deliberately resolved in what form to compose this standard of belief, and what particulars it should contain; while posterity in remote times would have been without the means of comparing different accounts of the same transactions. On the other hand, if there were no variations in four histories of One whose whole life was occupied in scenes of an extraordinary nature, a suspicion would have arisen which could not easily have been removed, that the writers either wrote in conjunction or transcribed from each other. Now as the case stands, we have every moral proof that all the matters related in these books are true, and that the narrators of them wrote under the immediate direction and information of the same Divine Spirit who enabled the prophets of old to describe the person and reign of the Messiah.

Many incidents occurred in the ministry of our Lord, which neither of the Evangelists have com-

mitted to writing ; and one who was most intimately acquainted with his Master's discourses and actions, declares that the relation of them could not be brought within a reasonable compass for publication. This being so, the wonder, surely, is not so much, that there are apparent dissonancies in these memoirs, as that the delineation should be so exact in all of them as to remove every doubt from the candid mind concerning the truth of what is stated by each of the Evangelists. The shades of difference in the sacred narratives are like the variations observable in several paintings of the same object, which, though represented in an opposite light and with a change of position, still shows the same features and characteristic distinctions.

An exact harmony of the Gospels cannot indeed well be expected, because the notations of time when many of the events happened are entirely omitted ; nor have we the means of determining the real order in which the respective books were written. On these points, therefore, learned men may speculate in various ways without affecting the validity of the evidence ; and their conclusions, however wide they may be from each other, will serve only to aid the common faith, by showing that, after the most patient and rigid examination, its principles are eternal, and the facts not to be shaken. But whatever variety of opinions may subsist on the literary construction or arrangement of the Sacred Writings, it cannot be denied, without doing injury to the Divine Author and the subject, that they constitute the sole rule of belief and practice to all who are brought to a knowledge of the saving doctrines which they impart. The supernatural gifts which were for special purposes bestowed upon those who formed the first Christian societies, no longer subsist, either in particular persons or collective bodies of believers : as, therefore, all the professors of this religion, with-

out any exception, are destitute of an unerring spirit, either within themselves or in the church to which they belong; Divine truth must be sought for in some established code, admitted on all hands to be of sacred origin, though different sentiments may be entertained concerning what it reveals. Our Lord, it is certain, wrote no book himself, and the earliest of the Gospels was not in circulation till some years after his ascension. But the necessity of such documents was not so immediate while the eye-witnesses were living, and when the great Head of the Church, by his Spirit, was ever ready to guide men into all truth. The particulars of the Redeemer's history were then familiar to his followers; but as the converts multiplied and the state of Judea declined, the written record became indispensable, that there might be no misunderstanding among the faithful in distant lands. Now what was requisite in the apostolical days, and for the unity of those who had an infallible teacher in the Comforter, must be still more so in times and countries far removed from the scene of action. Unless such memoirs had been drawn up by inspired persons, the evidences of the Christian religion would long ago have sunk into oblivion, or been preserved only through the uncertain medium of tradition. And though the leading features of our Lord's history might have been transmitted down to us with sufficient care and fidelity, from hand to hand, the doctrinal articles would have wanted authority, if they had not been explicitly stated in writing by men divinely informed and directed for that purpose. A presumptuous claim has indeed long obtained in one community, by which the exclusive distinction of being the rule of faith is taken away from the Holy Scriptures, and transferred to a supposed infallibility existing in the decisions of the church. That so daring an encroachment upon the Divine prerogative, and foul a

usurpation of the right of private judgment, should have met with apologists in this age, can only be attributed to that perverseness of prejudice which would rather sacrifice the Word of God itself, than abandon a single particle of ancient error. Yet it has been asserted, with little regard to propriety of language or correctness of argument, that if the Holy Scriptures are the single rule of faith, the Almighty must have acted in an arbitrary manner in giving a religion to mankind, which can only be understood by the educated part of the community. This fallacy, which becomes a Deist rather than one who calls himself a Christian, militates against the cause it is intended to support, since that faith, which depends wholly upon the testimony of oral tradition and catechetical instruction, is nothing better than childish superstition or mental slavery, unprofitable to man and unacceptable to his Maker. Besides, according to this sophistry, even the persons who are thus taught must be considered as partially regarded by the Lord of the universe; for it matters little in this case whether the doctrines which distinguish one class from another be acquired by word or writing, if the rule of faith is the revelation of Heaven. We have been also told, that a man may know his religion without being acquainted with a single chapter of the Bible; and that if letters were wholly obliterated, Christianity would be no loser, as the conservation of all truth is perfect in the Catholic Church. Thus the Divine oracles are made dependent upon human caprice, and no one can be certain whether what he hears is the Word of God or not, being deprived by his teachers of the inherent right belonging to all moral agents, of judging for himself concerning the validity of testimony. Happily, we have not been so taught by Christ, who, as he referred the Jews to the Law and the Prophets in proof of his mission, so he ordained that the Canon of Inspiration should

be completed for the purpose of becoming a universal standard of reference to his followers in every age and country, rank and condition. So long as our Lord was upon earth, his disciples had the advantage of learning all truth from his mouth, who had the Spirit beyond measure; but after his ascension the gift of the Holy Ghost was necessary to keep them from error, and to qualify them for the respective offices of "apostles and prophets, and evangelists and pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Ephes. iv. 11. But on the cessation of the supernatural endowments of prophecy and miracles, the Church was left to be guided by the written rule of doctrine; and "whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation*."

As, therefore, the possession of the Sacred Volume constitutes the great privilege of Christians, it is their duty to examine it with diligence, and to make its precepts the constant guide of their conduct. From these oracles alone can we learn the origin of our nature, the cause of our misery, and the remedy which God has provided for those who are desirous of his mercy. No human teaching is sufficient for this, because as no human authority could give us any information of the fall of man, or offer the promise of a recovery, so neither can uninspired wisdom afford comfort to the wounded conscience or dispel the fears of death. By the written word we are enabled to compare spiritual things with spiritual, the facts of history with the declarations of prophecy, the explications of the Gospel with the ordinances of the law; and here the human heart is faithfully

* Article the Sixth of the Church of England.

depicted, and the means of its improvement fully revealed. Let us, then, "study the Holy Scriptures, especially the **NEW TESTAMENT**; for therein are contained the words of **Eternal Life**: it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter*."

* **Locke's Posthumous Works**, p. 344.

THE
FAMILY INSTRUCTOR,
&c.

SEPTEMBER THE FIRST.

THE DIVINE LOGOS.

John, i. 1.—*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

THAT there are inexplicable mysteries in religion, is no more than what must unavoidably attend objects of faith, which man could not have discovered by his own powers, and of which he is unable, with all his inquiries, to form any ideas. Human reason cannot ascertain the existence of God and his providence, from the formation of the universe; for whatever contrivance may be observable in the several parts, or in the general utility of the whole, yet such are the irregularities of the system, and so many the calamities of life, that no ingenuity can thoroughly account for the one, or enable the afflicted mind patiently to endure the other. Revelation, then, is not only necessary to explain these difficulties, by showing the origin of evil, but to make man acquainted with his real condition; and the relation in which he stands to the Author of his being. To know that the worlds were framed by Infinite Wis-

dom, and that they are governed by Divine power and goodness, would be of little advantage to rational agents labouring with trouble and conscious of imperfection. In struggling under the pressure of bodily misery, and the deeper calamity of mental agony, they must have some certain information to alleviate their present sufferings, and to strengthen them against the terrors of futurity. Now, as nothing of this kind could be obtained by the exercise of reason, it must come from the Fountain of light, and can only be effectual for the gracious purposes it was designed to answer, when received in the simplicity of an unprejudiced mind. The only privilege that can be claimed in this case is, to examine with diligence and scrupulous care what is imparted as the revelation of God, and having fully assured ourselves that it is of Divine authority, then our single duty is to believe the doctrines which it affirms, and to perform the precepts it enjoins without doubt or hesitation. The Bible opens with a view of the Creator bringing all the elements out of chaos, infusing the principles of vitality into the mass of matter; and on the completion of the organized system of heaven and earth, rejoicing over it as very good. But no sooner does man appear upon the scene, endowed with superior powers to the other creatures, than mortality enters through his transgression of the covenant which the Almighty provided as the bond of security to keep out evil from defiling his works. Here the history of redemption begins; for the same glorious Being who brought light out of darkness, manifested himself in person, and pronounced the decree that evil should be limited in its objects and confined in duration. He who delivered this promise in Paradise afterwards renewed it to Abraham, and appeared to the leader of Israel in the flaming bush, conducted his chosen people out of Egypt, and made his will known to

the prophets. That he was the eternal and self-existent Author of all things, is plainly affirmed in the name by which he was known to the church of old, and in the attributes uniformly ascribed to him; yet nothing can be clearer than the fact of his becoming visible on various occasions, and engaging to come in the human form to his temple. Justly, therefore, does the evangelical historian introduce his narrative of that eventful period which is called the fullness of time, with an account of the high dignity of Him who made all things, and yet humbled himself to become the "life and the light of men," by being the restorer of that immortality which was lost at the fall. The appellative of God the Word was the known term in the church of Israel for the visible Jehovah, who held communion with the patriarchs, and of whom all the prophets witnessed as the Messiah, or anointed One, destined in the councils of eternity to bring in everlasting righteousness for his people, on which account he is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Rev. xiii. 8. Thus the reason is clear, why, in relating the incarnation of the Eternal Word, the attention of the Apostle was carried back to the origin of all things, because none but the Creator of man could raise him from death, and enable him to walk before God in the way of holiness.

It is evident, therefore, that this is no speculative opinion, which may be denied or modified as we please; for it affects the very foundations of revealed religion, and has a material influence upon the temper and conduct of believers. Right notions of the Deity are of the utmost importance to our present comfort and future happiness: now we find in that revelation which God has given for our direction, that man is a sinner who cannot be justified without a righteousness, which he is incapable of accomplishing by any act of his own, and for which

he must be indebted to the voluntary humiliation of One equal to the demands of infinite justice, and so identified with the parties he represents as to make what he endures in human nature effectual to their salvation. Such a Mediator is here described as descending from the highest state of glory and becoming man, that he might fulfill the law in all its parts, and offer in his death a complete expiation for the sins of the whole world. In this economy of grace both parts of the Sacred Volume harmonize, by showing that the same Power who breathed into man a living soul has condescended to be his Redeemer. When we contemplate this stupendous plan of mercy, and reflect at the same time upon the wretched and irremediable condition in which we should for ever have remained without it, gratitude must exalt our affections to the adorable Author; and while we are anxious to secure an interest in this great salvation for ourselves, it will be our earnest prayer and endeavour to promote the knowledge of it among all our fellow-creatures; "for if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John, iv. 11.

SEPTEMBER THE SECOND.

THE ANNUNCIATION.

Luke, i. 28.—*Hail thou that art highly favoured; the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women!*

WHEN man fell from that high state of trust and probation in which he was placed by the particular favour of his Maker, the sentence dooming him to his original dust, was accompanied with this declaration, which conveyed the promise of a recovery from the tyranny of the evil one: "I will put enmity

between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Gen. iii. 15. What was thus declared in Paradise began immediately to be carried into effect, for the institution of animal sacrifices represented the intended blessing; and the destroyer as quickly followed to obliterate or pervert all the steps taken to render the memorial permanent and its accomplishment certain. But amidst all the disorder produced by the enemy of righteousness, the course of Divine Wisdom was steadily pursued; and in the fullness of time the archangel, who had revealed to the prophet Daniel the exact period when the Messiah should finish the sacrifice and oblation, was sent to announce his incarnation. The state of the world was indeed fitted for the mighty change about to take place, but the instruments chosen for the purpose seemed to be ill adapted to the vast design. It had been expressly and repeatedly affirmed, that the Saviour of men and the restorer of Israel should come of the royal lineage; but at this period Judæa was a Roman province, and the family of David was reduced to the most abject circumstances. The sanctified vessel prepared to communicate the substance of humanity to the Eternal Word, was in such a mean condition as to be espoused to an artisan of her own kindred. In this disposition of events the primary decree was strictly performed, and yet the established usages of mankind were so regularly observed, that the Virgin Mother passed without any observation to her reproach. It was necessary that the Redeemer should be so born, because otherwise he would not have been the Seed of the Woman, which is properly descriptive of his miraculous conception, and clearly marks a distinction between the person thus predicted and the rest of mankind. But it was farther expedient that the Messiah should derive his birth from a

pure virgin, for the very purposes of his coming in the flesh, which were to make an expiation for sin and to bring in everlasting righteousness, to pay the forfeit of our offences and to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Now, if he was only conceived as other men, whatever might have been his qualifications or his virtues, his highest character must be that of a prophet; and, therefore, so far from making an atonement for the sins of the world, he would have needed one for his own. The angelical salutation indeed conveyed the most lofty ideas of greatness, and in appearance might easily have been misunderstood for the assurance of splendid glory to the person addressed and the nation to which she belonged. But so far was the Son of Mary from asserting his claim to an earthly diadem, or displaying the qualifications of a mighty warrior, he lived in constant poverty, shunned the attentions of the populace, and had not where to lay his head. Instead of seeing him seated upon the throne of Judah and restoring the independence of his country, as might have been inferred from the language of the archangel by ordinary reasoners, the Holy Virgin followed him to Calvary, and as she stood at the foot of his cross received this emphatic declaration, "Woman, behold thy son!" In that dismal and agonizing scene the faith of Mary was unshaken, and when other persons of her sex and condition would have been so overwhelmed with grief as to have withdrawn from all observation, she came forth, and, in defiance of danger, maintained her connexion with the righteous Sufferer in the face of his enemies. From this conduct it is evident that she was fully acquainted with the import of the celestial message, and the nature of that blessing which she was instrumental in communicating to the world. When she contemplated Jesus crowned with thorns, and heard his last tender bequest, all considerations of

temporal grandeur must have been abandoned, if any such she had ever entertained; yet even in these trying circumstances we find her rising above the infirmities of nature, and ministering to the wounded, mocked, and dying Saviour, of whom it had been said by the highest authority, that "he should reign over the house of Jacob for ever!" But through all this dark and dismal spectacle, which to the eye of sense confounded every hope and harrowed all the feelings of humanity, the mind of Mary was upheld by Divine power, and enabled to behold the mystery of redemption unfolded in the triumph of her Son. She saw the dominion of the adversary broken, the sacrifice for sin offered, and the gates of immortality unfolding to receive the heirs of glory through the righteousness of their Redeemer. Thus may it be said of this exalted believer, that she was "blessed among women;" not merely because that of her substance He was born who came to save his people from their sins; but that she was herself cleansed by his blood, called by his grace, and sanctified by his spirit. Mary stood in the same need of her Son's merits with the Apostle who supported her at that awful crisis, and to whose affectionate care she was entrusted; nothing, therefore, can be more injurious to the infinite majesty of the Messiah, and to the character of his mother, than to make her a partaker with him in the incommunicable office of intercession. The least that can be said of the extravagant honours and devotions paid by some mistaken Christians to the Holy Virgin is, that they proceed from ignorance, which furnishes, however, a miserable excuse for practices that are not only unwarranted by any Scriptural authority, but are directly adverse to the doctrines and precepts of Holy Writ; as expounded by the Son of Mary, who said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Luke, iv, 8.

SEPTEMBER THE THIRD.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN.

Luke, i. 78, 79.—*The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

THIS divine song, which the church has judiciously adopted into her devotional offices, beautifully portrays the blessings of the Gospel in the language of the Old Testament, with which the speaker, who was both a priest and prophet, was most familiar. Zacharias, and his wife Elizabeth, had this testimony from the Spirit of truth, that “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless;” but we are immediately told, that “they had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well stricken in years.” Thus eminently pious persons are sometimes under a heavy cloud, being to appearance less favoured by the goodness of Providence than the rest of the world. To be without children was considered as reproachful among the Israelites; but these pious believers, however much they might feel the privation, conducted themselves with meekness and resignation to the Divine will, not merely performing the duties of life with regularity, but approving their hearts before God acceptable and without offence. In this patient and humble state, while Zacharias attended the services of the temple in his course, an angel of the Lord appeared on the right side of the altar of incense. If this single vision struck the devout minister with awful apprehension, what must be the overpowering realities of the heavenly world to minds ill fitted for

such an association! and how can we bring ourselves, upon examination, to contemplate without fear the presence of innumerable orders of spiritual essences, whose purity as far exceeds human virtue as their power and intellect transcend our conceptions! The archangel relieved the mind of Zacharias, by the assurance that this was a manifestation of love and not of terror, being intended to announce the dawn of that glorious period which constituted the hope and prayer of all who, like him, looked for the consolation of Israel. That the coming of the Messiah was the matter of his prayer, is evident from the doubt and surprize expressed by him when informed that his wife should bear a son, who, as the precursor of the Lord; would "be filled with the Holy Ghost and be endowed with the spirit and power of Elias."

Zacharias well knew that this was the certain mark laid down in prophecy as characteristic of the Saviour's approach; but though he fully relied upon the promise, and earnestly desired to see it accomplished, this declaration of the heavenly messenger appeared so repugnant to the course of nature, that he staggered at the word, "because he was an old man, and his wife well stricken in years." Thus the venerable minister of the sanctuary, who was intimately acquainted with the oracles of God, was confounded by natural impediments, when his gentle relation, the destined mother of the Redeemer, received the wonderful information with pious submission, and replied, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." The opposite deportment of these persons in similar circumstances, presents a striking picture of the different manner in which the Lord of life was treated by the ancient church, that expected his appearance, but hesitated and rejected him when he came, and the believing Gentiles, who were not prepared for

his advent by ordinances and Scriptures, yet hailed the light with joy, and became the willing servants of the Lord of life, in spreading his Gospel among the nations. The judgment by which the want of faith was punished in the temporary suspension of speech, was a farther sign of the deathlike silence that should prevail in the Jewish state and people, as the consequence of the national infidelity and disobedience. But the word of the angel being verified, the tongue of Zacharias was released from its typical bondage, and his first exercise of it was to pour out this prophetic song; in which the mercies of God in times past are represented as figures of those to come. The throne promised to David was now to be established, and the covenant made with Abraham, after the mystical sacrifice of Isaac, was about to be fulfilled; of which the birth of John was the assured pledge, and his ministry the appointed means of preparation. But the kingdom here described is not after the fashion of this world, for so the prophet declares; when addressing his son, he says, "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Here Zacharias pointed out the Messiah's character as the Saviour of sinners, in language not to be misunderstood; and here, with equal clearness, he expressed the nature of that dominion which the same Divine Person should obtain over the souls of men. The wonderful infant, whose birth was thus celebrated by the Holy Spirit, preceded the Sun of Righteousness, as the morning star ushers in the light; and the blessed effects of the Dayspring which then dawned from on high, gradually increasing more

and more into the perfect day, were, the dispersion of ignorance, which is the darkness of the intellectual world ; the awakening of men from sin, which is the sleep of the soul ; and the conversion and direction of their hearts and inclinations into the way of peace, that is, of reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ ; to themselves by the answer of a conscience cleansed from sin, and to one another by mutual love. “ Happy is the people that is in such a case ; yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord. They are the children of the light and of the day. Their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself ; for the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended*.”

SEPTEMBER THE FOURTH.

THE NAME OF JESUS.

Matthew, i. 21.—*She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS ; for he shall save his people from their sins.*

THIS divine message contains a summary of the entire Gospel, with respect to the character of the Messiah and the nature of his kingdom, the work which he was to perform, and the church to be redeemed by his grace. “ It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation,” observes an Apostle, “ that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ;” which faithful saying, so commanding of our faith and gratitude, is evidently the declaration of the angel, announcing the incarnation of the Saviour and

* Bishop Horne’s Considerations on the Life of the Baptist, p. 36.

explanatory of his name. The archangel had already signified to the virgin mother, that the fruit of her womb should be called Jesus ; but in this manifestation to her spouse, the same heavenly messenger, while he made known the miraculous conception and the name which the wonderful child should bear, condescended to assign the reason why that appellation was to be given him, and in what sense the person bearing it would be a deliverer. For this apparent difference sufficient causes may be adduced, but the principal will be found in the circumstances of the parties to whom the respective communications were made. It was enough to assure the one that her son would " obtain the throne of his father David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever ;" but Joseph being in trouble about her condition, and consulting within himself the means of separation to preserve his own honour and yet to save the object of his love from disgrace, it was necessary that his mind should be more distinctly informed upon the subject of redemption. He is termed a righteous man, because he regulated his life according to the rules of justice, which led him to put away his wife for her supposed infidelity ; but as they were only betrothed to each other, he resolved to do this in as liberal a manner as possible, consistent with the established usages of the country. While thus the good man meditated, he received this information in the visions of the night: " Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife ; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS ; for he shall save his people from their sins." Thus the name was expressly determined, and had such a special signification, that in its strict and appropriate meaning it could belong to no other than one who by his own Divine power and virtue was able to save men from all misery, and to put

them in possession of everlasting happiness. In a temporal view, some eminent persons had rendered themselves deserving of this name, and it was borne typically by that great conqueror who established the chosen people in the promised land. But the Saviour, whose birth was marked by so many demonstrations of the Divine interference, obtained this high distinction because he was decreed in the eternal councils of Heaven to rescue human nature from the dominion of the evil one. Sin is a state of bondage which involves all mankind, without any exception; for though its influence varies according to the several habits of the moral beings in whom it prevails, still of the whole race it may truly be said, that they are under condemnation. Outward circumstances, and the examples of others, may indeed so far curb our passions as to keep us from falling into gross errors of conduct; but there are points where legislation has no controul, and where public opinions can produce little effect. Here the force of nature is shown in all its deformity, and in the private walks of life man is seen, without any artificial guise, now raging with violence or pining with envy, here playing the tyrant, and there acting as the dupe of folly or the slave of his passions. If we scrutinize farther the recesses of the human heart, we shall find, even in those who make the fairest appearance in society, many deep shades to lessen the admiration which we originally conceived for their character; so that of the very best it may be said, in the language of unerring Truth, "there is none that doeth good, no not one." Rom. iii. 12. Thus the whole world lieth in wickedness, and all men, by the testimony of their own consciences, are proved to be under the vassalage of sin, which binds the will and perverts the actions of men, where they are least apprehensive of any wrong bias, and are wholly insensible to the consequences of their resolutions. From this state of

slavery Infinite Mercy brings forth a seed, whose affections are no longer set upon the pleasures of sense or the gratification of earthly desires, but being quickened by a new principle, study to approve themselves "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 14. Now, He that effects this stupendous change must of necessity be Divine; for what created being could possibly bring light out of darkness, or so alter the habits of man as to make him love what he before despised, and renounce propensities which were become familiar, like the right hand, and equally tender with the right eye? Yet such is the salvation which believers experience by virtue of their union with the Redeemer, whose coming in the flesh was revealed with so much solemnity, and whose very name indicates the mercy he bestows upon his people. They are not only delivered from condemnation, so that the charge of accusation ceases to remain in force against them, but their minds are renewed, and brought into such a state of perfect freedom, that the hope produced by it makes every one who hath it desirous of "purifying himself as his Lord is pure." 1 John, iii. 3.

Instead of resting satisfied with a partial reformation, or fancying that a good moral deportment constitutes the whole Christian character, they who are saved from their sins labour earnestly to be wholly freed from all the remains of indwelling corruption, it being their perpetual prayer that the "same mind may be in them which was in Christ Jesus." Philip. ii. 5. To believe in the name of the Son of God, is therefore a matter of primary importance, as it concerns the knowledge of our condition by nature, and of that to which we are called by the Gospel; for this is the commandment of the Father, "That we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments

dwellleth in him and he in him ; and hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us." 1 John, iii. 23, 24.

SEPTEMBER THE FIFTH.

THE NATIVITY.

Luke, ii. 14.—*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

WHEN the time drew near for the appearance of the Messiah according to what had been predicted of him by the prophets, a decree of the Roman government, commanding that all its subjects should be registered, obliged Joseph and Mary to leave Nazareth, that they might be enrolled at Bethlehem among the descendants of David. Thus the motives of jealousy or ambition are made subservient to the Divine purposes ; and while man seeks only his own aggrandizement or security, he becomes instrumental in bringing to pass the secret designs of Infinite Wisdom. On such an occasion, when many persons came from various parts on the same account, the town of Bethlehem was so filled with strangers that the arrival of one in Mary's condition could not be expected to attract any particular notice. The place, indeed, was so crowded, that there was no room in the inn, and the Virgin Mother was under the necessity of taking up her lodging in the stable, " where she brought forth the Lord of life and the Heir of glory." How beautifully doth this circumstance illustrate the great truth concerning the Redeemer, which is expressed in the thirty-ninth Psalm, " I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were !" And as he was, so are we in this world. Let not then the salutary remembrance of our pilgrimage be

out of our minds. Let us not forget that we are travellers like our father Abraham of old, only passing through the land, which we are afterwards to inherit anew in the kingdom of God. "As strangers and pilgrims let us abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," in that capacity, and impede her progress to the heavenly Canaan: and let us wean ourselves from all foolish fondness for things, places, and persons in this world. For thus saith the holy Jesus to every believing soul; "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty; for he is thy Lord God, and worship thou him." Here thou hast no abiding city; the church itself is but an inn, constructed for the reception and entertainment of poor pilgrims on their way to the Jerusalem above. Here the soul is strengthened and refreshed, but here she is not to stay. What Christ once said to his disciples he says to them still, and they ought continually to say to each other, "Arise, let us go hence."

The "Son of God was laid in a manger, because there was no room for him in the inn." This night was the hand of Jehovah upon every high thing, to bring it low. How is all the glory of the world blotted out at one stroke! Ye pomps and vanities, farewell! henceforth I will no more complain of bad accommodations upon the road of life. If there was no room for the Lord of glory in this world, shall I wonder that there is none for me? Shall sinful dust and ashes complain, when he did not? Must I squander my money upon extravagant furniture, when he lodged in a stable? Cannot I rest upon down, when he made his uneasy bed in a manger? Surely, riches and honours cannot be the things which the world takes them to be, when the world's Creator thought them worthy of nothing but his contempt.

If there is no room for me in the inn, I will remember there was none for my Redeemer. I will go meekly and patiently to the stable, and there I shall be sure to find Jesus.

“Our Lord, at his nativity, was wrapped in swaddling-clothes.” Despise not infants, for Jesus was one. Contemplate with the Virgin Mother this wonderful child, set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; for the fall of those who are offended at his humiliation; for the exaltation of those who can accost him even in his swaddling-clothes, “We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.” Think how these holy feet, now tender and unable to support his sacred body, shall bear him over Judea with a great zeal, for the gaining souls to the belief and obedience of his holy laws; those are the feet which shall walk upon the sea as upon firm pavement; which Mary Magdalen shall wash with tears, and wipe with her hair, and anoint with costly ointment, as expressions of love and adoration, and there find absolution and remedy for her sins; which finally shall be rent by the nails of the cross, and afterwards ascend above the heavens, when the earth shall become the footstool of the great King. In the same manner consider those hands which were so often lifted up to God in prayer, whose touch was miraculous, cleansing lepers, restoring perished limbs, opening blind eyes, raising the dead to life; those hands which fed many thousands, which purged the temple from profaneness, which in a sacramental manner bare his own body, and gave it to be the food of elect souls; which afterwards were rent upon the cross till the wounds became the instruments of everlasting benediction. We may also behold his holy breast, and reflect, that there lay the sacred heart, like the dove within the ark, speaking peace to us, being the seat of love and sorrow, the fountain of both the sacraments running

out in the two holy streams of blood and water, when his blessed side was pierced as the rock was smitten in the wilderness.—The glad tidings of the Redeemer's birth were first brought by an angel, saying, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." A sermon this well worthy the tongue of an angel, and which ought for ever to employ the thoughts and voices of the children of men; for never since the day in which Adam left the gates of Eden was there so gladsome a sound heard upon the earth. Heaven itself gives man joy of the birth of a Saviour, a Saviour of all men, whether Jews or Gentiles, from sin and sorrow, and the wrath to come; one anointed to instruct, redeem, and govern his people; one, who was Jehovah, infinite in mercy, wisdom, and power. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them who publish this salvation!" These tidings came to shepherds. Poverty of spirit, contempt of the world, and simplicity of heart, are the qualifications which dispose for the reception of Christ, and draw down Divine visitations. The news came not to the great, the rich, or the voluptuous. And why? The great would never stoop to Him who came in obscurity and humility; the rich would despise Him who came in poverty and nakedness; the voluptuous would have no taste for Him who lodged in a stable, and lay in a manger. Such propriety is there in that renunciation of the world, and the flesh, made by every person, when taking on himself the Christian profession. The shepherds were "keeping watch over their flocks by night." Happy the man whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing; employed in a conscientious discharge of the duties of his calling, how mean soever it may be, if it is but an honest one. No man so engaged is to be despised by the dis-

riples of Christ, who appointed man to labour, and is pleased thus to reward the labours of the diligent, with a manifestation of his glory. "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on the earth peace, good will towards men." Surely this is a night to be much observed among the generations of man for evermore. Who does not fancy himself in the field with the poor but happy shepherds? Who does not think he suddenly hears the strains of the night sweetly invaded by sounds which never can be exceeded but by the music that welcomes the departing soul into the regions of peace and harmony, and hails its safe arrival in the fields of paradise! "There is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." What wonder, then, that at the birth of the Son of God, for the redemption and salvation of the world, there should be a jubilee in heaven! The wonder is, that there should be not one upon earth, and that man should be unconcerned at an event which brought forth the spirits above in multitudes, to admire, adore, and celebrate it. But be not thou, my soul, among the ungrateful and unthankful. Rejoice thou in the Lord Jesus always, and magnify his holy name for ever; taking up and continuing, with all thy powers and faculties, the song first set by the angelic choir for that purpose, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men *."

* Bishop Horne's *Thoughts on the Nativity*, in the *Christian's Magazine*, vol. ii. p. 618.

SEPTEMBER THE SIXTH.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

Luke, ii. 21.—*And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel; before he was conceived in the womb.*

WE are now led from the birth of the Redeemer to his circumcision, the account of which immediately follows the homage paid him by the shepherds. This was the beginning of His sufferings, who was made of a woman under the law, that he might redeem all who were in a state of condemnation and bondage. But it was also the beginning of joy, because then commenced the great work of salvation, when the blood of this immaculate victim was first shed, in obedience to the Divine ordinance, for the expiation of sin. If it be asked, why He who was spotless should endure a painful ceremony, which was a sacramental sign, denoting the necessity of an inward purgation from all defilement; the answer is obvious, that he did it on our account and as our representative. "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. v. 21. He bore our griefs, that we might enter into his joy; he put on the bloody garment of sin and death, that we might be clothed with the robe of righteousness. He became not only one with us, as the head is with the members, but one for us, as the surety is for a debtor. Therefore, though he could neither need circumcision nor baptism for himself, yet, as the Mediator and atonement for human nature, he submitted to both, that he might "fulfill all righteousness." As it was necessary that he should be made flesh and blood, it

became equally so that he should be circumcised on the eighth day ; by which rite he put himself under the full obligation of the law, its duties and penalties. Thus Christ by this act took our debts and entered into a covenant for us, engaging to discharge all that was against us, and to submit even to death, that he might redeem us from the curse.

The blood which was now shed in the person of the infant Saviour, was a pledge that he would shed the whole at the time appointed ; and this he performed, when, upon the cross, he paid the full ransom for our deliverance ; so that henceforth “ there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Rom. viii. 1. Against all who are not united by faith to the mystical body of this Saviour, the law of God still flames with the destructive terrors of Mount Sinai ; and we are assured that “ he who offendeth in one point is considered as guilty of the whole.” James, ii. 10. Happily, however, the Son of God came into the world to save sinners of every description ; and his grace imparted in baptism, and made effectual by the renewal of the heart, will quicken those who are dead in trespasses, and nourish them to eternal life. The spirit of both sacraments, therefore, or that of the old and that of the new law, is one and the same, being intended to show the necessity of our separation by Divine power from the pollution of sin, and through the cleansing nature of the Redeemer’s blood, in whom we are “ circumcised with the circumcision made without hands ; buried also with him in baptism, wherein also we are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Col. ii. 12. But it is evident, that the blessing so procured and signified by the ordinances of Heaven, can only be beneficial by personal application and the continual exercise of our faculties, striving against sin and labouring after holiness, “ without which no man shall see the

Lord;" for, as the same Apostle observes, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." 1 Cor. vii. 19. · Heb. xii. 14.

SEPTEMBER 'THE SEVENTH.

THE EPIPHANY.

Matthew, ii. 2.—*We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

THE history of our blessed Saviour is distinguished by circumstances which show the extreme humiliation of his condition and the dignity of his nature; the lowliness to which he submitted, contrasted with the majesty of which he was actually possessed. Thus no sooner is it said that the virgin mother had brought forth her Son, and laid him in swaddling-clothes, than a light from heaven shines upon the fields of Bethlehem, and the angel of the Lord, attended by a celestial choir, announces the happy tidings of salvation to the shepherds, who kept their flocks by night; so likewise at the close of his life, when he arose from his agonizing conflict in the garden, where he prayed that the cup of bitterness might pass from him, yet at the sound of his voice the soldiers who were sent to apprehend him—retreated, and fell to the ground. In like manner, when he expired upon the cross, it was with a triumphant shout, as that of a mighty victor over his foe; and at that moment the earth witnessed the event by a convulsive shock, while the heavens above were covered with supernatural darkness. Another very remarkable particular which attended the Redeemer, was that of his being born in the meanest of situations, at an inn and in a stable, as a stranger and a sojourner upon earth; yet

even in this abject state he received the homage due to this regal character, and his coming upon earth was hailed as a universal blessing. Here he was visited by ambassadors of the highest rank, who acknowledged his divinity, and brought him presents after the Eastern manner; thereby literally verifying the declarations of ancient prophecy, "The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts; yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him."—"All they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord." Ps. lxxii. 10. Isa. lx. 6.

From these passages it is reasonably inferred that the persons who came by the direction of Heaven in search of the new-born King, were princes of high distinction in Arabia Felix, a country abounding with fine gold and valuable aromatics. Here reigned that celebrated queen, whose visit to Solomon makes so conspicuous an appearance in Sacred history; and in its neighbourhood dwelt Balaan, whose famous prediction of a star to arise out of Jacob, could hardly fail to become matter of traditionary record among a people who were noted inquirers into nature, and were particularly skilled in astronomical observations. The men who sought the infant Messiah, are called by the Evangelist, Magi, which in the usual acceptation denoted the lovers of wisdom, or such as devoted themselves wholly to the pursuit of divine and human knowledge. In their number were frequently enrolled persons of the most exalted rank, who regarded wealth and power as talents entrusted to their management, but which could be of no service unless employed in the cause of learning and virtue. Of this description were the men who astonished the court and people of Jerusalem with the inquiry, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." It was a common opinion

in the ancient world, that the nativity of extraordinary characters was always marked by some preternatural appearances in the heavens; and therefore, in accommodation to this received notion, the luminous meteor was revealed to the wise men, who must at the same time have had also some positive information concerning its real design and direction. On this point, indeed, the evangelical historian is silent; but from what is recorded in another place, of the light which shone upon the shepherds, that it was accompanied by an angelical interpreter, it is reasonable to suppose that the Magi had a similar communication. That these pious inquirers were however previously acquainted with the oracles relating to the Messiah, seems evident from their language, in which they acknowledge his regal dignity, and profess their intention of submitting to his righteous government; freely declaring that he was a king, and at the same time confessing his divinity. But in whatever way their information was obtained, the use which they made of it calls for our admiration, and their example suggests an excellent lesson of practical importance for our improvement. Here we see men of great attainments and the highest distinction renouncing their national prejudices and superstitious attachments, to go in search of truth in a foreign land, ready to embrace it under any circumstances in which it should be found, and to encounter danger and contempt for the sake of "Him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed." Gen. xxii. 18. On their arrival at the capital of Judæa they presented themselves, without delay, before the reigning prince, to whom they imparted the purport of their mission, thinking, no doubt, that the intelligence would be heard with gladness by the people most interested in the event. But instead of receiving the tidings with joy, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. That a tyrant and usurper

should be disturbed by the information which these religious travellers brought, was not to be wondered at; but that the Jews, who looked for the coming of a deliverer, should be disquieted at the report of these wise men, might seem unaccountable, did not experience convince us that mercies are little regarded when they come through a different medium from that upon which we had set our desire and expectation. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were offended most probably at the presumption of these men, who were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel; and, therefore, though the Sanhedrim could not avoid giving that direction which was demanded, concerning the birth-place of the Messiah, yet not one of them accompanied the pious Arabians in their search, either in courtesy of manners or curiosity of spirit. But these Gentiles showed the sincerity of their faith by persevering in the pursuit of the object which they had in view, and by worshipping the infant Saviour, though they discovered him in a mean condition, exposed to all the ills of poverty and distress. A contrast, in all respects like this, is still exhibited in the opposite deportment of inquiring Christians and nominal believers; for while the one seek diligently the pearl of great price, to attain which they sacrifice temporal ease, honour, and profit, the others content themselves with barely speaking of religion in commendable terms, but without taking any pains to enlarge their minds, to improve their hearts, or to correct their lives by its rules and precepts. Such professors, whose faith is in their lips, choose to sit down in luxury and amidst the riches of the world, when called upon by the Redeemer to follow him in the path of humility. Far different is it with the pure in heart, who, awakened by the Gospel sound, leave all things, to go out eagerly in quest of eternal life, never remaining satisfied till, like these first converts of the heathen,

world, they have prostrated themselves before their God and King, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith." Heb. xii. 2.

SEPTEMBER THE EIGHTH.

THE SONG OF SIMEON.

Luke, ii. 30.—*Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*

WHEN the Redeemer of men came into the world he was made subject to the law, not only that he might, as our representative, perform all its demands, but to set us an example also that we should follow his steps. He was, therefore, circumcised on the eighth day, though he had none of our impurities; and at the period appointed by the Levitical ritual, his mother presented him in the temple, with an offering suited to the poverty of her circumstances; though, as the Son of God, he was born without sin, and consequently could stand in no need of any atonement. But thus he paid obedience to all the ordinances of that system which was to terminate with his personal sacrifice; and in this scrupulous manner did he conform to the most rigid exactions of the Mosaic institute, that he might lay down a standing rule for his church to the end of time. In this meek compliance with outward forms, our blessed Lord condescended to teach us the lesson of practical humility, and the indispensable duty of submitting our will and wisdom to Divine revelation. Here also, in the conduct of the holy Mary, parents may learn the obligation which lies upon them of devoting their infant offspring to the service of the Almighty, who is the author of every good gift, and without whose sanctifying influence that which creates present gladness may prove the source of

sorrow. If the blessed virgin brought her immaculate infant to the temple, with a pair of turtle-doves, it becomes a solemn charge with all who are made partakers of the Christian name to come also before the Lord with the children whom he has given them. But we are farther instructed in this great principle of religion by the peculiar circumstances which distinguished this event of our Saviour's early history. It had been foretold by the last of the prophets that the Messiah should come suddenly to the temple ; but the manner or age of his appearance was not indicated in this prediction ; and yet we find two persons of eminent piety regularly watching in that holy sanctuary, and waiting from day to day for the consolation of Israel. Of Anna the prophetess, it is said that she had lived a widow fourscore and four years, yet she departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. The object of her extraordinary devotion is explained in the narrative, that immediately on seeing the wonderful child she acknowledged him for the promised " Lord, and spake of him to all who, like her, looked for redemption in Jerusalem." But the account of Simeon is more full and remarkable. This venerable character evidently appears to have been a man of high distinction among his countrymen, " being just as well as devout ;" which eulogy deserves attention, and shows that he was not merely an ascetic, or one who devoted himself to the forms of religion, but that he filled some public station, the duties of which were discharged by him with the strictest integrity. The piety of Simeon then did not seclude him from society, nor did his faith in the Messiah render him indifferent to the concerns of active life.

Though it was revealed to him that he should not see death till he had beheld the Lord's Christ, the good man still continued in the exercise of his calling as a citizen of Jerusalem, but regularly attending the

hours of prayer in the temple. Such will ever be the disposition and deportment of every true believer, who waits for his Lord in the way marked out by Providence and Grace; placing all his happiness in the enjoyment of the Divine presence, yet pursuing with indefatigable diligence the vocation to which he is appointed. The devout Christian is careful to respect the whole service of the sanctuary, and earnestly seeks his Saviour in every ordinance, being never weary of well-doing, nor growing impatient under any delay. Even in old age he contemplates with grateful feelings the initiatory sacrament, by which the church gains an accession of members; and he turns the ceremony to his own improvement in the examination of his heart, and to the benefit of others by reminding them of their obligations. The faith of Simeon, like that of the patriarch, endured a long trial, but it was strengthened by habitual piety, and by a constant waiting upon the Lord in the courts of his house. There he found that blessing which had been for so many years the object of his prayers; and on entering the temple by the direction of the Holy Ghost, he saw and embraced the wonderful Child foretold by Isaiah; after which all worldly considerations appeared as nothing in his estimation, and he was content to lay down his hoary head in the grave in peace. On this ecstatic occasion the aged saint uttered that prophetic song which the church has adopted in her evening worship, and which is admirably descriptive of the glory of the Redeemer's kingdom, in the conversion of the Gentiles and the final restoration of Israel. The declaration of Simeon, that he had now seen the salvation of the Lord, corresponds exactly with the uniform language of ancient prophecy concerning the person of the Messiah, who is represented as being the Jehovah of his people. What Simeon contemplated with so much rapture, was, at this time, to appearance, no-

thing more than a helpless infant ; yet of this child did the inspired man freely and openly, before the public congregation, witness this confession, that he was the salvation of God. The great work which the incarnate Word had undertaken to accomplish, was now begun ; and this blessed servant of the Most High saw, by the power of the Spirit, the whole mystery of redemption, in all its stages of humiliation and triumph, fully unfolded to his mental view. Gladly, therefore, did he profess his faith in the divinity of the Saviour, though at the same time he knew and predicted that the child in his arms would not only be for the rise but also for the fall of many in Israel. The prophet saw in Jesus that Mighty One, who would save his people from their sins, and whose sceptre should extend over all the earth ; yet through the medium of inspiration he beheld the same Saviour in his most abject and persecuted state, as “ a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.” Notwithstanding this various prospect and painful contrast, the good man rejoiced, because he knew that the sufferings of the Redeemer made an essential part of that salvation which he came to effect for all who believe in him ; and on this account the holy confessor was willing to enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God, being assured that what was begun would be perfected by “ Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” Heb. xiii. 8. The holy Simeon could now depart in peace, not that his mind had hitherto been disturbed by any doubts concerning the Divine verity and goodness, but because the promise of redemption was in a state of accomplishment ; and that as he had “ lived in the faith of Christ, so to die would prove his eternal gain.” Phil. i. 21.

SEPTEMBER THE NINTH.

THE HOLY INNOCENTS.

Matthew, ii. 16.—*Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.*

WHEN the wise men informed Herod of their business in Judea, the tyrant became alarmed for his safety, thinking, in common with carnal minds, that the dominion of the Messiah was of a temporal nature. Conscious of his guilt, and fearful of its consequences, the usurper resolved to destroy the rising competitor; but knowing the prejudices of the Jewish people, and their anxiety on this object of general expectation, he went secretly and hypocritically to work, that no measures might be adopted to prevent his design. He therefore called the strangers to a private audience, and after a close examination communicated to them the prophecy concerning the birth-place of Christ, enjoining them to search Bethlehem with diligence, and on finding the child to make him acquainted with the discovery. Herod affected to be actuated by the same pious motives with those which brought the Magi to Jerusalem; but in reality his treacherous mind neither regarded the decrees of Heaven, nor felt the impulse of humanity. The Arabian travellers went on their journey with hearts greatly enlivened by the Divine direction, and, being unsuspicious of any evil intentions on a subject of universal interest, they would have gladly hastened back to Jerusalem with the tidings of

the Saviour, if the same Power, by whom they were guided from the East, had not, in a midnight warning, enjoined them to return home another way. In this interval the presentation of the Child in the temple evidently took place, otherwise he must have been brought again to Bethlehem; though the Evangelist, who describes the ceremony and relates the wonders which attended it, says, that Joseph and Mary then returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth, which lay in an opposite direction. The protracted stay of the Magi wrought up the disturbed passions of Herod to a pitch of fury; and when he found that these sages had quitted his territories, without condescending to make him acquainted with the result of their inquiries, his apprehensions converted the whole into a plot against his throne and his life. Thus agitated by pride and fear, the inhuman monster, who intended at first to cut off only one innocent victim, now sent his orders to murder all the male children of two years old and under, in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood. To this dreadful massacre the historian has adapted, by a mode of application common in the New Testament, a descriptive scene in the prophecy of Jeremiah, where Rachel is represented as weeping over the tomb of her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not. The act of savage barbarity perpetrated by Herod, has been called in question on account of the silence of Josephus, who wrote the history of those times; but valuable as this writer is, he collected his materials from those who were friendly to the memory of Herod, and he makes no scruple of declaring, that there are some bitter truths which no grave and modest author will be disposed to relate. But though this historian passes over the massacre of Bethlehem unnoticed, a pagan writer has been more honest and explicit; who not only mentions the fact, but the sarcasm which the report

of it drew from the emperor Augustus, "that it was better to be Herod's hog than his son." This horrible slaughter, while it shocks our feelings and draws tears from our eyes, presents also some considerations of edifying instruction and comfort. The infants of Bethlehem were the first martyrs of the Christian church; and distressing as the catastrophe must have been to their afflicted friends, yet the innocence of their minds, and the cause in which they fell, rendered them an acceptable offering at the altar of Christ. They were in appearance lost to the world, and their departure was attended with the sounds of lamentation and woe; but in that happy state to which the spirits of these highly favoured children, as the first fruits of redemption, were conveyed, there is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, but all tears are for ever wiped away from the mourner's eye. The prevalence of diseases, and the long train of complicated ills which perplex us in the journey of life, are so many calls to wean our affections from this shifting scene, where we have no abiding place, because every moment takes something from our enjoyments. The awful manner in which these children of Bethlehem were cut off, must no doubt have been peculiarly agonizing to their parents; but, setting the iniquity of the tyrant aside, the untimely fate of so many victims was no greater an evil than what is produced by the sudden desolation of an earthquake, or the sweeping ravages of the pestilence. Mortality, in whatever shape it comes, has a degree of terror in its aspect, and leaves a gloom on the countenances of the survivors; but painful as the separation may be, there is an inestimable consolation arising from the reflection, that it is the stroke of a Father, who makes use even of the wicked to accomplish his purposes of good to the righteous; and though now we cannot possibly discern the reason of his dispensations, yet the time is

coming, when, our faculties being enlarged, we shall both see and admire that part of his government which here below appeared most dismal and unaccountable to our narrow understandings. Amidst the accumulation of public and private distress, the loss of friends and the pressure of bodily infirmities, the depression of poverty and the misery of exile, there is a small still voice which administers this word of support and hope to the believer, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." John, xiii. 7.

SEPTEMBER THE TENTH.

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS.

Luke, ii. 52.—And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

As our blessed Lord came into the world that he might set us an example, every incident in his life demands our most serious consideration; and the more attentively his eventful history is regarded, the greater effect will his doctrine and precepts have upon the heart and the conduct. It is observable, that only one of the evangelical historians has recorded any particulars concerning the youth of Jesus; and this remarkable difference in the Gospels may have been purposely designed for our edification, that we might exercise ourselves in examining and comparing the several narratives which the inspired writers have given of this holy Teacher, who came from God. On the return of Joseph and Mary out of Egypt, they went and resided in a lowly capacity at Nazareth, in Galilee, from whence they repaired every year to celebrate the passover at Jerusalem. According to the injunctions of the law, all the male

children were required to attend this solemn festival ; and, therefore, when he had attained the age of twelve years, Jesus was brought to the temple, that he might join in the services then performed in commemoration of the national deliverance. At the expiration of the feast, and when the strangers had departed to their respective places of abode, this wonderful youth remained in that part of the sacred building appropriated to public instruction, where the expounders of the law gave free access to all who were desirous of information. We are informed by the Evangelist, that "the child waxed strong in the spirit, and that the grace of God was upon him ;" which declaration is explained by the testimony of the person who was appointed to prepare the way before him ; "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God ; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." John, iii. 34. Yet it is said of Jesus, that he increased in wisdom as well as in stature, by which we must understand that his faculties expanded gradually ; in all which progress he showed forth to those who beheld him the power of religion and the advantages of knowledge. He studied with diligence, and the objects of his application are clearly marked in what occurred when he was discovered by his anxious friends, after a search of three days, in the temple, "where he sat amidst the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions." As the matters discussed in this assembly were of the profoundest kind, embracing the explication of the legal ordinances, and the application of the prophecies, the readiness of this Child in starting points of inquiry and solving difficulties, naturally filled the learned professors with astonishment. When Mary gently remonstrated with her son upon the trouble which his stay had occasioned, his reply was remarkable : "How is it that ye sought me ? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?" This

answer, ambiguous as it seems, had a direct reference to the exercise in which he was engaged, and plainly denoted the subjects to which he had called the attention of the elders, as well as of the inquisitive auditory who attended on these occasions. What is rendered "my Father's business," might be properly rendered, the concerns of my Father's house; but in either reading we are led to the divine character of the questions which were agitated during these memorable debates. The coming of the Messiah as the Son of God, was peculiarly the great business of the temple, because this promise was shadowed in the formalities of the Mosaic ritual; it was the object typified in the remarkable feast just terminated; it constituted the essence of the law, and was the very life of all the prophecies. To this business, then, did the extraordinary youth direct his inquiries, and call for the observation of those who were the appointed instructors of the people. Well then might all who witnessed these colloquies be astonished at such a supernatural display of wisdom in an infant; yet we do not find that any steps were taken by the persons who admired this singular instance of early genius and grace to fix his settlement in Jerusalem. It does not appear, indeed, that any inquiries were made about him by those who had been charmed by his judgment and eloquence; for immediately on the appearance of his relations, who were Galileans of mean condition, the child was suffered to depart with them, and the curiosity of the congregation abated. To this proud and fickle spirit of the carnal Jews, the deportment of Jesus formed a striking contrast; for with powers which raised him above all the sons of men, he was also the humblest, going down to Nazareth with his reputed parents, and "being subject unto them, increasing in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man." Notwithstanding the prodigious knowledge which he had manifested

in the temple, he was still all meekness and diligence, yielding complete obedience to those who stood in the nearest human relation to him; improving his mind by continual study, and by discharging the various duties of his station in such a manner as to attract the esteem and admiration of his fellow-citizens. The course of his life was distinguished by laborious industry and contented poverty, an incessant attention to the work laid upon him, and an unaffected desire to promote the happiness of mankind. In him were completely exemplified all the properties of that "wisdom which cometh from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." James, iii. 17, 18.

SEPTEMBER THE ELEVENTH.

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN.

Matthew, iii. 1, 2.—*In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

ALL the servants of GOD, who were called at sundry times and in divers manners to the public office of building up his church, were fitted for the ministry by a previous seclusion from the world. They were set apart from society, that they might learn to subdue their passions, to mortify their senses, and to have their minds stored with Divine knowledge. Thus Abraham was a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, Moses was obliged to quit the court of Pharaoh and retire to the desert of Midian; and the prophet Elijah,

the great reformer of Israel, spent a considerable portion of his time by the brook Cherith and in Mount Horeb. The Messiah himself led a humble and retired life many years in Nazareth, growing strong in the spirit, increasing in wisdom, and setting an example of every virtue to those around him. In like manner the holy messenger, who was destined to prepare the way before him, was bred up with circumstances of singular austerity and abstemiousness in the wilderness of Judea. There was this difference between these extraordinary characters, that while the Saviour lived in the bosom of his family, and in an active employment, his precursor "grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel." But it was necessary that the one should be acquainted with the Divine mysteries by regular study and the gradual improvement of his mind, which the Redeemer needed not, because he was the Word and the Wisdom of God. In the severe course of discipline which John passed through, before his manifestation as a preacher of righteousness, we may perceive that religion, like every other science, requires close application, and an entire abstraction from all those pursuits and amusements which have a natural tendency to confound the attention and to corrupt the heart. What is termed the knowledge of the world will be of little value, unless the mind is previously strengthened by the solid principles of moral and religious truth; which, to be effectual in the various stages of trial and temptation, must be firmly settled in the season of youth. At the time when the Baptist made his appearance the Jewish people were divided into sects and parties; it was proper, therefore, that this holy man should be trained up in solitude, under the teaching of Heaven, apart from the corruptions of the multitude and the contentions of the learned. Here his intellect received spiritual illumination,

without being perplexed by the subtle refinements of human presumption ; and here, above all, he was taught how to apply the knowledge which he acquired to the most important of all purposes, in the ordinary conduct of life and the discharge of his public duty. Thus richly endowed with grace, and raised above the world by an habitual simplicity of manners, did John enter upon the ministry, being full thirty years old when the word of God came to him in the wilderness. This was also the age of Jesus when he was inaugurated to his office ; and from hence we learn the vast importance of the ministerial character, which as no person should undertake without serious inquiry and laborious preparation, so it ought not to be engaged in till the mind is thoroughly impressed with a sense of all its obligations. The doctrine preached by this second Elijah was repentance, or an entire conversion of the heart to God, by a renunciation of self-righteousness and an absolute submission of the will and affections to the Divine law in its native purity, divested of the traditions and explications of men. He inculcated this alike upon all who came to hear him, and declaring that there was no other entrance into the kingdom of heaven, which was now at hand, than by this change of mind from the slavery of sin to the love of holiness. The deportment of John corresponded with the lesson which he preached, and the tidings delivered by him ; for his diet was of the plainest kind, and his clothing indicated the extreme poverty of his condition. Thus did the ambassador in all respects prove worthy of his Divine Master, who had not where to lay his head ; and though both made known the way of life with earnest zeal for the welfare of men, yet both were the objects of bitter persecution, and were at length cut off by a violent death on account of their fidelity. Curiosity brought numbers to the banks of the Jordan, where the powerful discourses of this extraordinary preacher

made many desirous of his baptism, and among others some of the Pharisees and Sadducees. But so far was John from being elated by this popularity, or flattered by the attention of these sectaries, that he regarded them with stern severity, from an instinctive conviction of their gross hypocrisy; and a persuasion that they would be the principal enemies of that salvation which was about to be revealed, and which he was sent to announce. This faithful minister preached the same truths to the rulers of the people and those who were under their authority, freely telling them that the formality of a religious profession, so far from being accepted by the Judge of all hearts, would only aggravate the condemnation of those who made it, unless it was accompanied by good works. The Baptist informed all who came to him that a new state of things was about to take place, of which none could be made members without a deep internal repentance, and such a change of disposition as would lead them to embrace poverty and contempt, persecution, and even death itself, for the sake of an entrance into the kingdom of God. He taught those who came to his ordinance, that their minds must be renovated and rendered completely submissive to the dispensation of grace, in the absolute renunciation of their old prejudices, the voluntary mortification of their passions, and a readiness to follow the Saviour in the way that he should lead them, agreeable to what was foretold, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." Is. xl. 4. What was thus represented as necessary for the profitable reception of the Messiah, at his first coming, is equally indispensable to prepare men for his second manifestation; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heb. xii. 14.

SEPTEMBER THE TWELFTH.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

Matthew, iii. 16, 17.—*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased:*

THE baptism which distinguished the ministry of John was adopted from the practice of the Jews, who made use of a similar ceremony in admitting proselytes to their communion. There was indeed no express statute for this rite in the Levitical law; but the rabbins, among other reasons for the usage, assign the command given to Moses, that he should sanctify the Israelites, and cause them to wash their clothes against the time that God would declare from Mount Sinai the covenant they were to enter into with him, *Exod. xix. 10*. But, what is more to the point, it was the current opinion of this people, that the whole nation should be baptized in the time of the Messiah; and this belief they grounded, not without reason, upon the prophecy, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness.” *Zech. xiii. 1*. Baptism was, therefore, considered as denoting the purification of the mind from its former errors, and an initiation into a new life. Hereby also the believer was taught to regard himself as bound by peculiar obligations to walk worthy of his profession, since for those who “offend wilfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins,” *Heb. x. 26*. These notions of

the sacrament were familiar to the Jews, as far as concerned the external duties which it imposed upon the converts to their faith; but the divine messenger, who now made it an indispensable ordinance of his mission, represented it as preparatory to another dispensation, under the administration of One who "would baptize the people with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Matt. iii. 11. This prediction, which is clearly two-fold, was completely fulfilled in the persons of those who obeyed the voice of the Redeemer, and also with respect to the nation at large, by whom he was rejected; for upon the former descended the mighty power of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost, by which they were enabled to call the Gentiles to the truth, while impenitent and unbelieving Israel was visited by the fearful judgment and fiery indignation due to the adversaries of righteousness. The baptism of the Holy Ghost was eminently successful in the conversion of the heathen to the knowledge of the truth, while the other continues to preserve the seed of Jacob as a memorial among all people, till the time of their purgation shall be expired; and to this agrees the declaration of the prophet, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." Mal. iii. 3, 4. But as He who came to save men from their sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, needed not the baptism of water to cleanse any impurity, or to prepare him for a life of holiness, it may be asked to what purpose did the Saviour condescend to present himself among the crowds that attended the ministry of John on the banks of the Jordan? The Baptist himself was surprized at the sight, and shrunk from the performance of the service, saying, "I have need to

be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" To this remonstrance Jesus meekly answered, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him." Having taken our sins upon him, it was requisite that the Messiah should discharge all the duties which belong to the divine life, whether the same be external or internal, moral or ceremonial. He accordingly went down into the river, as he afterwards did into the grave, that he might set us an example, and be our leader to the regions of immortality; on which account it is observed by an Apostle, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. vi. 4. The due use and efficacy of this institution we learn from what is recorded of our Lord, that "as he was praying," for the completion of the great work in which he was now engaged, "the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him;" a voice from the celestial glory at the same time proclaiming his nature and office, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Such are the blessings which, in effect, do always attend the Divine sacraments, when duly administered and properly received with faith and prayer. For then the heavens are opened, and the Holy Spirit is given, conforming the worshippers to the image of their Saviour, and rendering them through his merits acceptable in the sight of God the Father, "of whom are all things and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by him." 1 Cor. viii. 6.

SEPTEMBER THE THIRTEENTH.

THE TEMPTATION.

Matt. iv. 1.—*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.*

WHEN the head of the human race was formed out of the earth, his Creator placed him upon a course of discipline in the garden of Eden; but the desire of knowledge beyond his condition, and of rising to an equality with the celestial powers, brought him under the dominion of evil, and made him subject to death. In this state of condemnation, the promise of a Saviour, who should inflict a mortal wound upon the adversary, cheered the mind of the exile, and became the ground of confidence to all his religious descendants. It is necessary to keep this history of man's apostacy in view while we attend to the circumstances of his redemption; since, without considering the cause of his misery, it is impossible to understand the nature of the remedy, or to comprehend the means by which it was effected. As sin entered by temptation, so this has ever continued to be the principal engine of his government, who, according to the language of Scripture, is "the prince of this world." All the avenues of the human mind are familiar to him, and he knows well how to adapt his delusions to the dispositions of those upon whom he forms his designs. Hence it is that he maintains so extended an influence in the moral creation, over which he spreads vice and ruin, making men the instruments to further his views by the force of their example, corrupting others while they deceive themselves. No person is exempt from the attacks of this potent adversary, nor can any one escape from his destructive snares without the Divine assistance. It was for this purpose expedient, that HE who came to work out our salvation, should "be tempted in

all points," according to the circumstances of the human nature which he had assumed, and the office to which he was consecrated. The enemy with whom he had to contend, still trembled in the remembrance of his sentence, and the view of its accomplishment. That he was apprized of the Saviour's coming is evident from the persecution excited against the wonderful Infant, and the horrible massacre of the children of Bethlehem. But there is a limitation to the devil's knowledge as well as to his power. Though he could not be ignorant of the miraculous birth of Jesus, he was a stranger to his real dignity. The Divinity of our Lord became unfolded by degrees, and was not fully made known till his resurrection. This indeed was necessary to the nature of such a trial as that in which he was now engaged; and which required the complete discharge of duty, and consequently the successful resistance to every obstacle that could be laid in his way. That the power of the adversary might have been annihilated by a single stroke of vengeance is certain; but the work of redemption was of the probationary kind, and intended to bring those who are the subjects of it, through sanctification, to the kingdom of glory. On this account "the Captain of their salvation was made perfect through sufferings:" and therefore immediately after his baptism and the anointing of the Holy Ghost, he was "led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

In this solitude, which formed a perfect contrast to the paradisaical state forfeited by our first parents, Jesus remained without any sustenance forty days and forty nights, during which period his body was exhausted by fatigue and his soul assaulted by various trials and suggestions. The particulars of these are not recorded; but since the Apostle asserts that "He was in all points tempted like as we are," the serious mind has free scope to expand its contempla-

tions upon this awful subject ; and, from its own sad conflicts, to conjecture the magnitude of the Saviour's sufferings in that desolate situation. Through the whole of this space, upon which the Evangelical historians are silent, no doubt Satan put forth all the energies of his nature, and all the subtlety of his genius, to bring the object of his malice into the snare of corruption. Concise as the sacred narrative is, enough appears even at the beginning, to show that Christ in his humiliation had to encounter the utmost power of the devil.

At the expiration of this time, the tempter perceiving his languishing state for want of food, said, " If thou art the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread." That the devil was in doubt of the real character of our Lord at this time seems probable, from the manner of his attacks, the propositions which he made, and the passages of Holy Writ adduced by him to enforce his counsels. This appears more particularly in the colloquy which took place on the battlement of the temple, when the tempter cited the prophetic declaration concerning the Messiah, " He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

The answers of our Lord to these insidious attempts, were given in the general language of Scripture, direct, indeed, as rebukes to the adversary, though not calculated to make him acquainted with the information which he was so anxious to possess. But the last scene in this wonderful transaction is that which requires most consideration. Failing in his aim to ascertain whether Christ was really the Son of God, another course was adopted to shake his integrity. " Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them ; and

saith unto him, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Much has been said upon the impossibility of exhibiting such a view from any mountain of the earth; whence some have explained the difficulty by supposing it to have been an optical illusion, visionary representation, or a graphical illustration of the several kingdoms and their glories. But it is not necessary to suppose that any such scenic delineation took place, as that of splendid cities and extensive empires; if we consider the tempter as opening to view the formidable legions ranged under his dominion as the prince of this world, and offering to transfer the rule over them to our Saviour. This seems implied in the account given by St. Luke: "And the devil said, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me, and unto whomsoever I will I give it. If therefore thou worship me, all shall be thine." Our first parents were deceived by the expectation of attaining the rank of divinity, and becoming "wise as gods." A similar allurement was herein held out by the tempter, who perhaps thought, that by the proud and gorgeous display of his numerous dependencies, he might be able to excite an unlawful ambition in the mind of Jesus. But this parade of glory discovered the real character of the seducer, to whom our Lord replied with majesty, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Upon this exposure the adversary, conscious of his guilt, "quitted Jesus for a season;" to whom, upon this triumph over the powers of darkness, the spirits of light appeared and ministered their services. From this mysterious history an instructive and consoling lesson is derived, for the daily exercise of the Christian. He also is called to pass through the wilderness of trial, where he must unavoidably endure many difficulties, and encounter various tempta-

tions. These are inseparably connected ; and no man can enter the kingdom who has not in this course been enabled to overcome the world. But to do this by human strength or resolution is impossible ; since the enemies with whom we have to contend are equally powerful, subtle, and numerous. They act with incessant vigilance under their potent chief, whose constant aim is to impede the Messiah's progress, and to injure him in the members of his church. Well, therefore, did our Lord teach us to pray daily, that we may not " be led into temptation, but be delivered from the evil one." The trials of life cannot be avoided, nor is it fit they should ; but against the fierce assaults of Satan, and the extent of his machinations, prayer and faith are continually necessary. In all cases, however, whether ordinary or extraordinary, this is our consolation, that " we have a merciful and faithful High Priest, who having himself suffered and been tempted, is able also to succour them that are tempted." Heb. ii. 17, 18.

SEPTEMBER THE FOURTEENTH.

CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES.

John, i. 39.—*He saith unto them, Come and see.*

OUR blessed Lord having successfully resisted the tempter, by going through the appointed period of probation in the wilderness, returned into society, that he might accomplish what remained to be done in the great work of redemption ; and on his arrival at the spot where John was baptizing, that divine messenger, in allusion to what had just taken place, exclaimed, " Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world !" This declaration of the Baptist being repeated by him the next day, induced

two of his disciples to follow Jesus, who said, "What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, which is to say, being interpreted, master, where dwellest thou?" One of these was Andrew, but the other is not named by the historian who records the circumstance; whence it is concluded with great probability, that the person was no other than the Evangelist himself, though, with his characteristic modesty, he omits to notice his own honourable share in the transaction. The two inquirers did not take upon them to intrude into the dwelling of Jesus, without first soliciting his acquaintance, and asking permission to wait upon him; whence we may learn that true religion, so far from encouraging a forward and curious disposition, begets diffidence, and a respect for the ordinary civilities of life; while in the answer of our Saviour, "Come and see," we have a practical lesson of hospitality, courteousness, and friendship. The disciples abode with our Lord the whole of that day, and the subject of their conference in this interesting period appeared in the conduct of Andrew, who lost no time in seeking out his brother Simon, that he might communicate to him the important intelligence of his having found the Messiah. This, therefore, must have constituted the matter of discourse during the many hours in which the two disciples had been with Jesus; and it deserves serious observation, that the faith of these men was the effect of investigation, without being assisted at that time by the evidence of miracles.

Knowing the sincerity of their Master, and feeling a deep concern in the promise of redemption, these devout persons, who were looking for the consolation of Israel, readily pursued the course pointed out by the Baptist, though in so doing they were obliged to leave an endearing connexion to follow a stranger, with whose extraordinary virtues and powers they were unacquainted. By their example we are taught

the duty of forsaking every profession and attachment when eternal happiness is set in our view ; and when the word of truth thus speaks to the conscience : “ This is the way, walk ye in it.” Is. xxx. 21. But if, like the first disciples, we are called upon to go out after the Lamb of God, it is equally necessary that we should also, as they did, exercise ourselves with diligence in the search of divine knowledge, and the examination of all the proofs by which revealed religion is supported.

The disciples of John were led by reverence for his integrity to desire an interview with the wonderful Person of whom they had heard such an amiable character ; but they were resolved also to judge for themselves, whether he answered what had been laid down in prophecy concerning the Messiah. Perceiving their object, and approving of the spirit by which they were actuated, the Redeemer said, “ Come and see ;” or, in other words, “ Come and investigate freely the evidences of my Divine mission ; search the Scriptures, and see how far the marks of the promised blessing agree to what you have already experienced, and the testimonies which will be brought forward for the satisfaction of your minds.” In this inquiry the disciples spent the rest of the day, and departed with the full persuasion that the Messiah was actually come, though not under those splendid circumstances which the nation at large fondly believed were to distinguish his appearance. The poverty of Jesus formed no objection against his claims in the estimation of these humble inquirers, who not only acknowledged him as the promised Saviour, but took the earliest opportunity of bringing others to the enjoyment of the same privilege with themselves. This should be our conduct, otherwise the religion which we profess, whatever may be its excellence in many respects, is no living principle of the heart bringing glory to God, by showing a

good example before men. If we have been favoured with the knowledge of the truth, the discovery brings with it many new duties, among which one of the most considerable is, that of promoting the circulation of the same blessing among our fellow-creatures. Accordingly we find that Andrew hastened to inform his brother of the coming of Christ; and when Philip was called, he sought an early opportunity of bringing Nathanael to Jesus. The good man hesitated at first, because he could not conceive that the expected mercy would come from Nazareth; but the solicitation of his friend prevailed over his scruples, and the proof which our Lord gave of his omniscience removing every doubt, he joyfully became a disciple, saying, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!" In this manner did the kingdom of the Redeemer commence, without any controul of the will or appeal to the passions; and thus must we embrace the Christian religion, upon a full conviction of its Divine origin, which cannot be done without a calm and close examination of its evidences and its principles; so that, in the language of the Apostle, we may "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear." 1 Pet. iii. 15.

SEPTEMBER THE FIFTEENTH.

THE MARRIAGE IN CANA.

John, ii. 11.—*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

WHEN man was formed out of the ground, and made a living soul, he stood in need of an associate

for the enlargement of his mind, and the due use of the blessings with which he was surrounded. The Almighty could indeed have produced two of the species at the same time, as he did in the rest of the animal creation; but in this particular instance he thought proper, for a wise and exalted purpose, to adopt another course; and man was constituted a rational agent, possessing authority over the earth and its various inhabitants, without having any partner of his cares or his pleasures. Yet this solitary state was declared not to be good or fitting for man; by which is to be understood, that however well qualified he might be to exercise the dominion allotted to him, or to discharge the duties of his station towards others, still for the preservation of universal order and the fulfillment of the Divine intentions, in the constitution of the world, it was not agreeable to the economy of nature and Providence that he should be alone. To fill up the vacancy, therefore, woman was formed out of the substance of man; and this peculiarity, as it laid both parties under the obligation of the same law, and united them in the common interest, so the knowledge of their origin taught them this truth, that the continuance in their present condition was to be of limited duration, and preparatory to another sphere of action in which they who have gone through their trial with approbation, "neither marry nor are given in marriage." Matt. xxii. 30. So long as the earth and the heavens shall continue to act according to their original establishment, this law of social intercourse will be of imperious and perpetual obligation; conformably to which principle, and to show that the new covenant makes no alteration in the primary rules settled for the government and conduct of man, the first miracle which our Lord performed was at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, to which he, and his mother, and his disciples, were invited. The Redeemer himself led a life of celibacy,

because, as the seed of the woman, he was our surety and representative for the recovery of that life which had been lost by the head of the human race; but he gave to the marriage state an express sanction, by guarding it from the abuse of divorce, and pronouncing every wanton desire to be a breach of the seventh commandment. As there is no circumstance in the eventful history of this wonderful Person but what abounded with important instruction, we may be certain that this beginning of miracles, besides confirming the faith of the early disciples, was recorded for the edification of the church to the end of time.

The relation does indeed carry our ideas back to the blissful region where our first parents enjoyed every blessing suited to their faculties, on the simple terms of avoiding the knowledge of evil. While they were contented within the limits which Infinite Wisdom had prescribed for them, all things were sanctified to their use; but when they aspired beyond the condition to which they were fitted, their curiosity ended in shame and misery. Thus what was pure became vile, and that intercourse which God had instituted, and even enjoined with a blessing, was turned, by the unruly passions of the fallen creatures themselves, into a source of perpetual trouble. But as the object of our Saviour's coming was to place human nature upon its original footing, and to deliver it from the bondage of corruption, he sanctified by his presence and actions every relation and condition to which man is called by the original law of his Creator. Accordingly, though the Son of God in his own person endured poverty and practised abstemiousness, he contributed to the enjoyments of others, and wrought miracles for their refreshment in the wilderness; after which he retired to a mountain, having previously sent away his followers to their families and employments. He lived continually as one who had not where to lay his

head ; yet he readily accepted the invitations of publicans, and even pharisees ; sitting with them at table, and turning every circumstance on such occasions into matter of spiritual improvement. The presence of Jesus, then, at this marriage, and his miraculous conversion of the water into wine, must be viewed, not only as an act of gracious condescension, but as a material incident in his ministerial character sanctifying the ordinance itself, and giving it the most expressive mark of his approbation, that his disciples in every age may learn to glorify God in all the duties of social life. In the change also of the simple element to the juice of the vine, we perceive the union of the two natures that subsisted in Christ, for the purpose of reconciling man to his Maker, and of recovering the right to the tree of life, which was forfeited by the loss of innocence. Thus the feast in Cana proves a perpetual rule of instruction for faith and practice, to all who are called by the Christian name, teaching us, that while we enter into the service, relations, and connexions of society, according to the Divine appointment, the influence of grace will accompany every engagement, lighten the difficulties which we may experience, and turn all our troubles to good, in a way that is the least expected. Here also we have another lesson of admirable virtue, in the benevolent attention of our Lord to the duty of hospitality ; for if he favoured a feast with his company, and displayed his power to aid its enjoyments, we may be certain that the most acceptable service in his sight will be the exercise of liberality and cheerful piety, by those who profess to be his disciples. As he gave this remarkable blessing to the marriage state, so he encouraged all who embrace it according to the spirit of the Gospel, to cast their cares upon Him who careth for them ; at the same time teaching them, by his own example, the necessity of mutual accommodation for their own happiness and the edi-

fication of those around them ; which course, according to the Apostle, constitutes the most perfect resemblance to the union of the Redeemer and his mystical body : wherefore, “ husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” Ephes. v. 25, 26.

SEPTEMBER THE SIXTEENTH.

PURGING OF THE TEMPLE.

John, ii. 17.—*And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

“ WIST ye not that I must be about my Father’s business ? ” said the blessed Jesus to the virgin mother when she gently remonstrated with him on the sorrow occasioned by his stay in the temple. That sacred edifice being peculiarly the house of God, became the seat of reverence and delight to this wonderful child, who listened with earnestness to the discourses of the learned professors, both hearing them and asking them questions. At that time he conducted himself as a diligent student and serious inquirer after truth ; not content with merely attending to the lectures delivered from the chair of instruction, but leading the teachers by his observations to the farther investigation of the doctrines which they advanced. But though he surprized all who were the witnesses of his extraordinary wisdom, he did not then assume any authority ; thus setting an example of modesty and industry, piety and submission to his followers in every age, showing the duty of obeying the higher powers, and the necessity of keeping within the strict

limits of their station, till by the appointment of Heaven any of them shall be called to a more public employment. When, however, our Lord had gone through this course of probation, and was solemnly consecrated to his divine office, by the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the declaration of the Eternal Father, sanctifying the ordinance of baptism, he made his appearance in the temple, clothed with the dignity of the judicial character. He commenced his ministry to the nation by an act which could not fail to draw upon him general notice, and to render his name famous in every part of the Jewish state; because it was performed in the midst of that great annual festival which brought persons to Jerusalem from the remotest regions.

It may seem incredible, that a people remarkable for their superstitious veneration of the temple and its services, should have been guilty of applying any part of the structure to secular purposes; but the place which they so sacrilegiously abused was the outward court of the Gentiles, where the uncircumcised believers, and those Israelites who were in a temporary state of separation, had the privilege of divine worship. Now by this allowance of a market in that portion of the building, these people were prevented from attending to their devotions with the calmness of spirit and seriousness of mind indispensibly necessary to the proper discharge of that holy duty. This practice also had a natural tendency to encourage a worldly disposition in the rest of the people, which would produce disrespect for the sacred offices, and a want of charity towards their brethren, especially those whom they considered as strangers to the covenant. The buyers and sellers, indeed, might perhaps have urged this for their excuse, that the articles there vended were intended for sacrifice; but no plea of utility or expediency could be sufficient to justify an encroachment upon what

God had set apart for his own honour, and for the comfort and edification of those who came to prostrate themselves at his footstool. The persons concerned in this trade, and they who gave it their countenance, under the pretence of serving religion, brought it into contempt, by reducing it to the mere empty performance of rites and ceremonies; for no one that had a becoming sense of his obligations would have left his offering unprovided till he came to the altar, where it was to be presented. But the iniquity of this abuse extended still farther, in robbing the proselytes of their appointed station in the temple, by making it a place of tumultuous dealing, where, besides the traffic in cattle, the exchange of monies was carried on, in which species of commerce every advantage was taken of the ignorance and necessities of strangers. Thus literally was the house of God made a den of thieves, and justly, therefore, did the Messiah begin his public work, by cleansing it from this vile profanation, thereby reproofing the Jewish government and people for their gross licentiousness, and informing them, that, notwithstanding their bigotry, he would take down the middle wall of partition, and unite all men in the same faith and the same worship. From his example we also learn, that zeal for the Divine glory is essential to the profession of religion; for though every one has not a call to exercise the office of reformer, it is the duty of all, however humble may be their station or abilities, to set their faces against customs and indulgences, by which the honour of God is affected in the perversion of men's principles and the corruption of their manners.

But as the zeal of the Redeemer was accompanied by the display of miracles for the benefit of the afflicted, so must our animation in his service, and boldness for the truth, be distinguished by the spirit of meekness and love towards the persons, even of

those men whose errors we may find it necessary to oppose. "Therefore," in the language of the Apostle, "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom. xii. 20, 21.

SEPTEMBER THE SEVENTEENTH.

CHARACTER OF NICODEMUS.

John, iii. 21.—*He that doeth truth cometh to the light.*

THE astonishment of the Jewish people at the conduct of so mean a person as Jesus in undertaking to correct the abuses of the temple without being clothed with human authority, was quickly converted into admiration of his miracles, which clearly proved his Divine power and the amiable benevolence of his character. When the worshippers who came to celebrate the great annual feast at Jerusalem beheld the most inveterate diseases removed by a single word, and that without any previous intercourse between this extraordinary person and the objects of his compassion, they readily acknowledged the hand of God; and many of them believed that this was the Messiah, or, as his name imported, the promised Saviour of men. But as the time of our Lord was not yet come, in which he should accomplish the great work of redemption, by offering a full and sufficient oblation for the sins of the world, he avoided holding any private communication with these converts, because he saw that their minds were not prepared for that spiritual kingdom which he came to establish; and it was contrary to the scheme of sal-

vation, that any part of it should even seem to be the result of worldly power or policy. On this account Jesus did not commit himself to those believers who were ready to receive him as the Anointed One of God, for he wanted not their testimony and assistance in the way which they were disposed to show their zeal for his service. Among the many upon whom the wonderful works wrought at this passover made a deep impression was one of the Pharisees, who was also a member of the sanhedrim and the ruler of a synagogue. But though Nicodemus was perfectly convinced that one who displayed such a noble earnestness in the cause of religion, and who performed so many miracles, must have a Divine commission for what he did; yet since the council had threatened to excommunicate the followers of Jesus, this learned man, anxious as he was to seek after truth, was afraid of incurring any danger in the pursuit. For this reason he came to the dwelling of the Redeemer when darkness covered the earth, that his visit might pass unnoticed; and it is observable, that whenever the Evangelist has occasion to mention the name of Nicodemus, it is always accompanied with the remark, that this was the same who came to Jesus by night. In the ordinary affairs of life prudence will dictate a wary circumspection about the consequences of actions, and a careful solicitude for personal safety and reputation; but when the Divine honour is concerned, and the progress of truth is affected by our example, every precaution taken to avoid reproach, for the sake of righteousness, indicates that the fear of man has more influence over our hearts than the love of God.

Between the conduct of our Lord and that of Nicodemus there was this striking difference, that the former shunned public notice to prevent the distinction which the erroneous ideas of men might incline,

them to bestow upon him ; while the Jewish doctor, though he was persuaded that Jesus was a teacher come from God, dreaded to make an open avowal of his belief, lest the confession should bring him into danger and be attended with the loss of his dignity. Yet the Redeemer, who had so lately manifested his boldness in punishing the sacrilegious profaners of holy things, was so far from treating the timidity of this man with severity, that he received him courteously, and conversed with him freely in a spirit of meekness, because he perceived the sincerity of his heart, amidst the weakness of his faith. Thus are we taught by the highest authority how to demean ourselves towards those of our fellow-creatures who are in error, by making every allowance for the infirmity of human nature, and endeavouring to set them right by the force of reason and affability of behaviour. The declaration of Nicodemus, that our Lord was a teacher come from God, though it did not directly amount to a confession that he was the Messiah, evidently implied a wish to be satisfied upon that important point ; and the answer shows, that He who knew what was in man discerned this to be the great object of the Jewish elder in courting the present interview. Accordingly Jesus, in his reply, came at once to the very matter which agitated the thoughts of the inquirer, by describing the state of mind which was necessary to the reception of Divine knowledge, and for the proper enjoyment of that blessing which was now imparted to the world. " Verily, verily," said he, " except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This kingdom was that of the Messiah, which constituted the general hope and expectation of men at this period ; and to obtain some information of which, this instructor of the people now came to One who from his piety and miracles appeared perfectly qualified to give him a full explanation. The motive was good,

but there lurked so many prejudices and corruptions about the heart of Nicodemus, arising from his education, habits, and connexions, that He who had the spirit of wisdom beyond measure, found it expedient to teach him in the very first instance the absolute necessity of mental freedom, as the preparatory requisite to the proper understanding of the system of grace. So long as a person is under the influence of his passions, and attached to human forms and customs, he will see truth through a very imperfect medium, and be more disposed to sit down contented with religion in the traditions of men, than to seek for it in the written word of revelation. What, therefore, our Saviour taught Nicodemus, he teaches us, that, to perceive the kingdom of God, and to know the salvation revealed in the Gospel, we must be completely divested of every thing that has a tendency to impede our search after eternal life. The Jews in general, and the Pharisees in particular, were so bigoted to the ceremonial law, that they resolved all religion into matter of form; and could not endure a doctrine which threatened to abrogate any part of the Mosaic institution, and the additions made to it by superstition. Jesus, therefore, freely told his visitant, that before the nation could see, or be fitted for the kingdom of the Messiah, they must be born again, by being renewed in their principles and reformed in their manners. This proposition perplexed the elder, whose answer was a plain confirmation of the necessity of what had been advanced, when he took the assertion of our Lord in its literal sense. Upon this the Divine Teacher entered into a fuller explanation of what he had stated as the necessary qualification of believers; and the whole of his discourse was intended to remove the narrow notions of the inquirer, by convincing him, that to the attainment of the divine life which he sought, two things were indispeusibly requisite—the outward pro-

fession in an open submission to the rite of baptism as the sign of faith, and the inward purification of the heart by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The new proselyte, for such he was notwithstanding his want of firmness, had an earnest desire to know and follow the truth; but the dread of disgrace, and a wish to preserve the good opinion of the world, hindered him from becoming an avowed disciple; on this account, and in allusion to his present cautious behaviour, he was told that no one could be a member of the Messiah's kingdom who did not come to the light, that his deeds might be made manifest before men. The effect of this conference may be inferred from the conduct of Nicodemus in reproving his brethren of the council for their injustice in condemning our Lord unheard, and from the liberality which he showed in bringing myrrh and aloes for embalming the body of Jesus, when, as it should seem, all hopes of redemption to Israel were cut off by his ignominious death, and nothing but obloquy could attend those who discovered a respect for his memory. Thus the fruits of a living faith were fully manifested in this eminent convert, and that too in a way which could leave no doubt of his sincerity; so that if he began in weakness, yet his heart being right towards God, he was accepted of him; and in his public situation he had an opportunity of bearing his testimony to the purity of Christ, and to all the mighty works which were performed by him, as the Apostle clearly intimated in his address to the heads of the people, after the effusion of the Holy Ghost; "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." Acts, ii. 22.

SEPTEMBER THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN.

John, iii. 30.—*He must increase, but I must decrease.*

THIS chapter exhibits a striking contrast in the behaviour of the Jewish elder, who believed in the divine mission of Jesus, yet was afraid to make an open profession of his conviction, and the noble spirit of John, who steadily rejected the honours which the people were eager to obtrude upon him, constantly declaring that he was no more than a messenger sent to “prepare the way of the Mighty One, the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose.” Nicodemus knew that the miracles performed by our Lord were such as could not have been accomplished by any other power than that of God; yet such was the love of the world, and the dread of persecution, in his mind, that he would not venture to appear publicly in the number of those who forsook all to follow a Master so poor and despised that he had not where to lay his head. The Baptist, on the other hand, took every occasion to direct the attention of the people to the Saviour, who was then about to be manifested among them; and so far was he from being jealous of the great reputation which Jesus acquired by his extraordinary works, the report of them filled his heart with gladness; and when his disciples said unto him, “Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness; behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come unto him” (thereby signifying that the honour of John would be eclipsed by his formidable competitor), the holy man surprised them by the delight which their intelligence had imparted. Instead of expressing any thing like discontent at the prospect of being

supplanted, or being envious of the popularity which attended Jesus, this meek and pure spirit received the information joyfully, contemplating without regret his own setting, because he was now fully assured that the sun of righteousness had risen upon the earth. The observation, that all men resorted to the baptism and preaching of Christ, was that which seemed most likely to move the passions of John, because the circumstance affected him in his ministerial character, and indicated the cessation of his calling. But none of these things disturbed the calm tranquillity of his disposition, or made him anxious to gather followers. He was sensible that the gifts which he possessed were communicated for a special purpose, and intended to promote the glory of God ; all his wish, therefore, was to see the same great object carried on successfully in the world, and to be instrumental in turning the children of Israel to the Lord their God. So far was he from repining at the thoughts of falling again into obscurity, the prospect gave him pleasure ; and that which made his friends uneasy, afforded him the richest consolation, because the Day-spring from on high was now manifest, according to the declarations of ancient prophecy, and to the word which he had himself delivered to his disciples : " Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him." Thus did John take his proper station as a messenger only ; and when the multitudes were ready to admit his pretensions to a higher character, he freely told them that he was no more than a servant, who having performed his allotted mission must retire and give place to his superior. But before this faithful minister withdrew from public life, he was careful to leave behind him a testimony by which men might be led to follow the Saviour, as the head of the Church, in whose communion is eternal life. " He that hath the bride is the bridegroom ; but the

friend of the bridegroom," who hath been called to witness the happy scene, and to announce the day of grace, "standeth and heareth him," not only in admiration of his loveliness and wisdom, but with inward delight in being made a partaker of the blessing so long promised and now revealed, "rejoicing greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." It was a source of rich satisfaction to the Baptist that he had been instrumental in awakening the minds of men at a time of general depravity, and that his discourses had prevailed with many to seek for that righteousness which could alone render them acceptable with God; now, therefore, when he found that the Messiah had actually shone forth, and that all men came to him, his generous mind could desire no higher gratification in the present state; for, to use his own language, Christ being now come, whose path I have faithfully prepared, "my joy is fulfilled." That light which shall illuminate the world to the end of time, being now risen above the horizon, gives me the signal to depart; "he must increase, but I must decrease." The reason of this will be evident from the consideration, that preparatory institutions and their ministers, being imperfect and temporal, must give place to what is divine and eternal; "he of course that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth," with the weakness and ignorance incident to fallen man; whereas, "He that cometh from heaven is above all." All human teachers, as well inspired as uninspired, are still no more than earthen vessels, consequently their message will in some degree partake of the infirmity which belongs to them in common with their fellow-creatures. But the Instructor who cometh immediately from above speaketh the words of God, because he receiveth the Spirit not by measure, or with the limitation of time and manner; but in the plenitude of wisdom, it having been decreed, that "in Him should all fulness dwell." For the

Father "loveth the Son," by causing the whole dispensation of mercy to be centred in him, and giving all things into his hand; so that there is no other name under heaven, whereby men can be saved, but by the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. This is the "way, and the truth, and the life," in obedience to whose word, and by virtue of whose merits alone, that immortality can be recovered which was forfeited by the transgression of Adam. therefore, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

SEPTEMBER THE NINETEENTH.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

John, iv. 42 — Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

THAT our Lord should at the commencement of his ministry make a more open declaration of himself as the Messiah, to the Samaritans rather than the Jews, has been considered as very extraordinary; but it is still more extraordinary that these people should have received him gladly in that character, merely by the power of his preaching, without the striking evidence of miracles. The whole narrative, indeed, is extremely interesting and abundantly instructive; showing the universal extent of redemption, and the disposition necessary to profit by His grace, who "came to seek and to save those who were lost." In our Saviour's journey to Galilee, after his first public appearance at the passover, he stopped near Sychar, a town of Samaria; and while he rested by

the side of a well his disciples went to purchase provisions. During their absence a woman came to the place, of whom Jesus asked a draught of water. The request was trifling, but the circumstances were so peculiar, that the woman could not help expressing her astonishment; for the Jews rigidly abstained from having any intercourse with the Samaritans, holding them in such abhorrence as to make it an article of their supplement to the law, that no person of this nation should become a proselyte in Israel; to which uncharitable decree they added the still more abominable judgment, that "the Samaritans shall have no part in the resurrection of the dead."

This hatred was chiefly grounded on the origin of the proscribed people, who sprang from the interdicted marriages of Jews with heathens; and their race being treated as an abomination, seemed compelled by the separation to set up another worship, distinct from that of Jerusalem. Accordingly, the Samaritans, who received only the five books of Moses, erected a temple on Mount Gerizim, where they had a mixed service, blending with the Levitical institutes many childish superstitions. But though their religious service was so very imperfect as to draw from the Redeemer this strong censure, "Ye worship ye know not what;" it is obvious from the present history, that the Samaritans had just notions of the Messiah, whose coming they expected at the very time when he vouchsafed to make known to them the blessing of salvation. The very woman with whom our Lord held this conference at the well, irregular as her manner of life had been, was well informed on the subject of the promise, and had correct ideas of the spiritual dignity of Christ as the teacher who was to guide men in the way of truth. When she found, from his conversation, that Jesus had the gift of discerning spirits, and thence justly inferred that he was a prophet, she immediately began to

make inquiries respecting the proper mode of worship. She knew what a stress was set upon the sanctity of particular places by the Jews and also by her own countrymen, and she was therefore desirous of ascertaining from this inspired Person which of the two was most acceptable to the Deity—Gerizim, which long usage had rendered holy in the estimation of the Samaritans; or Jerusalem, which the Jews regarded as the city of God. This inquiry Jesus condescended to answer by a declaration, that the time was near at hand, or that the dispensation had now commenced, which would put an end to all such local distinctions and frivolous grounds of religious discussion; for “God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Though this doctrine of the stranger went to the very root of her national prejudices, the woman was so far from being offended at what he had said, that she acquiesced in the principle by saying, “I know that Messiah cometh who is called Christ: when he is come, he will teach us all things.” No language could more forcibly express the conviction of the believer, that the promised Saviour was then about to appear in the world, and that he should teach men all that was necessary to be known and practised for the attainment of everlasting life. This Samaritan woman had no thoughts of a temporal conqueror and splendid monarch, who was to subdue kingdoms and to establish a mighty empire upon earth; but she rightly placed her hopes upon One who should put an end to all uncertainty, by teaching sinners every thing necessary to their eternal salvation. She consoled herself amidst these unnatural divisions and opposite pretensions, with the consideration that the time drew nigh when the wonderful Counsellor from above would make the Divine will clearly known, and open to men a more excellent way. Such was the faith of this poor outcast, with respect to the Messiah.

and it obtained the highest approbation when the Person to whom it was addressed said, "I that speak unto thee am He." But if the conduct of this woman, in hastening to communicate the important tidings to her countrymen, calls for our admiration, the readiness with which they received her testimony, and the improvement they made of it, should beget in us serious attention to the same great object which these candid Samaritans embraced upon conviction, after hearing the discourses of this heavenly Teacher. They were induced by the woman's report to visit the wayfaring person, concerning whom she had told them such extraordinary things; and though he belonged to a nation of whom they had too much reason to complain, yet, laying aside all jealousy and resentment, these honest Sycharites attended willingly to the word preached, and feeling the truth of it in their hearts, they without any hesitation made this joyful confession, "We know that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Thus a set of men who were cut off from the commonwealth of Israel, had purer ideas of the Redeemer, and more enlarged views of his kingdom, than the people to whom the promise was specially imparted, and who had the law and the prophets in full perfection. While, however, the one, with such high privileges, entertained the most unworthy notions of the Messiah, by limiting his grace to particular persons, and degrading his majesty to the care of temporal concerns, in the aggrandizement of their state to the exclusion of the rest of mankind, the despised Samaritans rightly believed in him as the Author of salvation to all the families of the earth. Nor in remarking upon this contrast, let us forget that these last, without having had any previous message to prepare their minds for the Divine Instructor, received him gladly and believed his doctrine, by hearing a casual discourse from his lips, while the Jews remained un-

reformed by the preaching of the Baptist, and the more powerful eloquence of Him "who spake as never man spake;" and who confirmed the truth of what he delivered by miracles, which plainly proved that he was a Teacher come from God. But if the conduct of these Samaritans condemned their unbelieving neighbours, will it not also be brought in judgment against those who, with an accumulation of evidences, still continue insensible to all the calls of mercy and the influence of example? "See then that ye refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." Heb. xii. 25.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTIETH.

THE BIGOTED NAZARENES.

Luke, iv. 22.—*Is not this Joseph's son?*

OUR blessed Lord, at the earnest request of the believing Samaritans, abode with them two days; and so effectual was his preaching, that the word operating upon minds open to conviction and unbiassed by prejudice, many embraced the truth and acknowledged him as the Saviour of the world. From thence he proceeded to Galilee, and at Cana he miraculously healed a youth who lay dangerously ill of a fever at Capernaum; which occasioned the conversion of the family, and increased the fame of Jesus throughout the country. Having thus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom, and confirmed the declaration by works which were beyond all human power, Jesus came to Nazareth, "where he had been brought up, and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day." This part of the narrative is im-

portant, as it exhibits a strong contrast between the Nazarenes who knew this excellent Person from his infancy, and the people of Samaria, among whom he was not only an utter stranger, but the member of a community marked by an unbending hostility to their society. It was upon one of the ordinary days in the week that the Traveller entered into conversation with the woman of Sychar ; yet the inhabitants, on her report, quitted their houses and employments to hear the discourses of this extraordinary Teacher ; and so convinced were they of his Divine character as to intreat his longer residence among them, that they might profit by the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. On his return to Nazareth, where the rumour of his marvellous actions had already come, he went, according to his wonted custom, into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day ; thus setting an example of conformity to established usages, and showing his respect for public worship. His townsmen were well acquainted with his manner of life, even from his youth up ; and they knew also that he was a regular attendant upon the services of religion in the house of God. He did not alarm them by any innovations, either in doctrine or practice ; nor did he endeavour to collect an assembly of persons separate from the place of accustomed resort, and at a time of labour when the business of life called the attention of men to their several avocations, for the general advantage. Jesus, on the contrary, chose the Sabbath-day for his ministration to the people of Nazareth, as being the period of holy rest and serious application ; though in his journeys through other districts he of necessity occasionally departed from this rule, by “ preaching in season and out of season ;” on a mountain, by the wayside, and from a vessel in the midst of a lake, to the multitude that lined the shore intent upon his word. In the synagogue he stood up for the purpose of reading the

portion of Scripture allotted to the day ; and there was delivered unto him the Book of Isaiah, on opening of which he found that the appointed lesson was the predictive portrait of the Messiah, contained in the sixty-first chapter of that prophecy. When he had closed, or rolled up the Scripture, which was always read standing, he sat down ; and whether from his manner, which indicated some intention of addressing them, or from the account of his preaching in other places, certain it is, that there was a general silence in the congregation, and the expression of curiosity to witness that eloquence which had been attended with such extraordinary effects in various parts of Galilee. The prophetic description which he had just read was so very remarkable and appropriate, that if these men had considered it with a devout temper of mind, they would have made the application themselves ; instead of which, they were so completely blinded by pride and hardened in uncharitableness, as to set their faces against the truth, because they knew the preacher and despised his connexions. When our Lord had expounded the prophecy, and shown in what sense it applied to that very season in which he ministered to them, the Nazarenes could not help bearing witness to his exemplary deportment, and to the marvellous deeds which he had performed ; but their surprize extended no farther than the vulgar astonishment of narrow minds, who wonder without making inquiry, and whose admiration never ends in improvement. That grace which dropped from the lips of Him who spake as never man did, produced no other sentiment in the men of Nazareth, even in the synagogue and upon the Sabbath-day, than the malevolent observation, " Is not this Joseph's son ? " They could neither call his wisdom nor his works in question, for the reputation of both was spread far beyond the reach of their envy ; therefore, to gratify their male-

volence, they had recourse to the history of his family and the meanness of his occupation: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Juda and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" Mark, vi. 2, 3. In their estimation the poverty of his origin was a sufficient plea for rejecting his claim to the character of a Divine teacher; after which we can be at no loss to discover the reason why Jesus wrought no mighty deeds among such perverse unbelievers, who would have remained obdurate, even if one had been raised from the dead for their conviction. But though our Lord healed none of their sick, nor displayed any of those glorious powers which distinguished him elsewhere, he confounded the Nazarenes by rendering their wicked designs abortive, and delivering himself miraculously from their hands, at the very moment when they were about to precipitate him from the hill on which their city stood. In like manner shall all the contemners of the crucified Saviour, and the persecutors of his church, be punished by the disappointment of their malignant efforts, and by seeing the cause of truth successful in spite of their ingenuity, reproaches, and opposition. "While the Redeemer is precious unto those who believe, he is to the disobedient a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence even unto them which stumble at the word." 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. Neither the efforts of men nor the malice of demons shall be able to impede the progress of truth or to hinder the purposes of grace, though to appearance the instruments chosen for their accomplishment are mean and insufficient, "because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." 1 Cor. i. 25.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

Luke, v. 10.—*And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not ; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*

THE man who has any device to establish will be careful, in the first instance, to select such instruments for his purpose as are the most likely to give it reputation, and to facilitate its progress in the world. This will be more particularly the case with every design to make an innovation in religious opinions, or to effect a change in public institutions. He that embarks in such an undertaking, merely on his own authority, however laudable may be his motives, will choose his associates with caution, and be desirous of such followers as will render his scheme popular by their credit or their eloquence. Had our Lord been actuated by any other consideration than that of bringing in eternal salvation for a lost world, by the sacrifice of himself, he would have sought for disciples at Jerusalem, from among those of his countrymen who, by their previous knowledge and connexions, were the best calculated to promote the new system and to spread the reputation of its Author. And even if he had been disappointed in the capital, he would at least have endeavoured to strengthen his party, by calling to his assistance persons well acquainted with mankind and familiarized to the ways of the world. So far, however, was Jesus from making any application to men distinguished by their learning and influence, that he seems to have studiously shunned their co-operation ; and nothing certainly could more clearly remove all suspicion of artifice in his ministry, than the circumstance of his adopting the fishermen of Galilee for

the promulgators of his doctrine. Neither were these men prepared for such an office by the ardour of enthusiasm or the force of friendship, which in some cases perhaps may carry the most ignorant and unpolished through schemes of insuperable difficulty to those who act with deliberate circumspection, by comparing the consequences of things with the means of effecting them.

These first preachers of the Gospel, on the contrary, when called to that arduous employ, were men of timid dispositions—rude in their conceptions, and zealously attached to their country and relations. Like the rest of the Jewish people, they entertained extravagant notions concerning the grandeur of the Messiah's kingdom; and though some of them had conversed with Jesus, on hearing the testimony of John, yet there was nothing in his condition that could induce them to leave their business and families for the service of one who was even poorer than themselves. Such were the persons whom the Lord selected as his principal friends and messengers, in preference to the opulent and the learned—the Scribes, practised in the law, and the Pharisees, whose sanctity was revered by the populace. The manner, also, in which these men were called to the ministry, evinced the Divine wisdom; for they were not initiated into that sacred profession by any preparatory course of instruction, or after a temporary separation from society, but taken at once from a laborious and mean occupation, that their knowledge and success might clearly appear to be of God. There was still another circumstance in this interesting part of the Gospel history which merits serious attention. At the time when Jesus came to the lake of Gennesareth, for the purpose of appointing his disciples to their office, they were fatigued with long watching and grieved by disappointment. It was, as it should seem, very early in the morning

that Jesus made his appearance, and directed Simon to let down his net for a draught. As the features of the speaker could not well be discerned in that faint light, nor his voice be recognized under such circumstances, the injunction of one who was plainly a stranger to the place and the employment, might have been treated slightly, and rejected without any apparent offence. The principal fisherman, however, so far from receiving the advice roughly, and refusing compliance with what was enjoined, courteously stated the hardships which he and his companions had endured in their nightly toil, adding, "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." This was not only the proof of a good heart, but of an extraordinary faith; from which we may learn the value of a courteous demeanour in persons of all descriptions, and of the diligent use of means in a right course, even when hope is reduced to the last stage of probability, and when the season of success has nearly expired. The accustomed hour of fishing was now over, yet Simon readily complied with the direction of his unknown friend, and the result of his obedience so greatly exceeded all natural causes, that no doubt could remain of the Power by whom this miracle had been effected. This was not only a trial of faith, but the assurance of a future blessing; affording an expressive emblem of that abundant increase which the church should receive through the labours of these men; and as Peter distinguished himself on this occasion, so he obtained the honour of opening the commission of grace to the Gentiles, "upon whom," to the astonishment of the circumcised believers, "was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." Acts, x. 45, 46.

When the word of salvation went forth, accompanied by the divine energy, feeble and contemptible as the bearers of it were of themselves, they became

mighty in converting the heathen to the truth, and spreading the knowledge of eternal life among those who had long sat in darkness; while the channel through which the promise had been transmitted for so many ages was dried up by the infidelity of the nation who rejected the Messiah whom they had so long expected. Thus was fulfilled in all respects the description of ancient prophecy concerning the new dispensation, which is represented as a temple sending out a cleansing stream for the recovery of all the families of the earth. "And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon the river, from Engedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets: their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. But the miry places thereof, and the marshes thereof, shall not be healed: they shall be given for salt." Ezek. xlvii. 10, 11.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Matt. v. 48.—*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

THE Divine Teacher, who came to guide men in the way of truth, and to bring life and immortality to light by his Gospel, having called those persons to be his disciples who were to promulgate the doctrines which they should learn from his mouth, retired with them from the multitude to a mountain, where he delivered a body of lectures, containing the summary of practical religion, grounded upon the moral law, but adverse to the refinements and additions of its professors. It has been generally supposed that these discourses were delivered by our

Lord in the hearing of the crowds that had been drawn about him by the fame of his extraordinary works; but the expression of "seeing the multitude," connected with the fact of his going farther from them, to a place where he could not be incommoded, plainly indicates that these prelections were of a private rather than of a public nature. Besides, we learn from another part of the Redeemer's history, that in speaking to the mixed auditories which attended him, he made use of parables; while to his immediate followers he revealed the things belonging to the kingdom of God, without any mystical covering. Now in this sermon, as it is usually termed, the principles are clear and the application obvious, though the language is occasionally, allegorical, and, according to the custom of the preacher, there are some striking allusions to the objects of nature which were then in view. That the whole, however, was designed for the information of the disciples only at that time, may be inferred from the polemical cast of the subjects, and the frequent observations which are made throughout on the traditionary decrees of the rabbinical doctors, in opposition to whose arbitrary and unprofitable distinctions the disciples were to minister as the "salt of the earth," and the "light of the world." But though the doctrines and precepts here laid down were primarily addressed to the original builders of the Christian church, the matter and obligation will be found of universal import; for every position advanced by the Author of our faith, explanatory of the Mosaic institutes, must be regarded as a confirmation of what is there enjoined; and accordingly he took care to guard his hearers from all misconstruction of his words on this point, by saying, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The blessings with which the general dis-

course is introduced, were designed to pourtray the temper and conduct necessary to be cultivated and improved by the disciples, who were to exhibit a perfect contrast to those proud and uncharitable bigots that placed all religion in outward observances and partial distinctions. When our Lord pronounced a benediction upon the poor in spirit, he at once characterized the disposition of mind which is requisite to prepare the believer for the due enjoyment of the privileges conferred by the Gospel, and for the exercise of the duties belonging to that high calling. As pride and the desire of prohibited knowledge deprived man of eternal life, the first step to the recovery of it must be a complete self-renunciation, the deep sense of misery, and a confession of absolute inability to perform what God hath commanded. This conviction of sin leads the awakened penitent to mourn his defiled state; which repentance, as it keeps him perpetually humble, renders him also meek and obedient to the Divine will, even when the terrors of judgment press sorely upon him, because he is conscious of meriting nothing from infinite justice but condemnation. The godly sorrow thus produced in the soul, on account of its corruption and separation from the Source of perfection, has the gracious effect of exciting an earnest desire after righteousness, or a perfect conformity in heart and life to the law of holiness. He that has his mind so renewed and set right towards God will be merciful towards his fellow-creatures, endeavouring on all occasions to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; enduring persecution without resentment, for the cause of truth, and even rejoicing that he is thus called upon to imitate his Divine Master for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Having thus described the disposition which is essential to the Christian character, as opposed to that lifeless profession which constituted the religion of the Scribes and Pharisees,

our Saviour proceeded to a detail of particular instances, in which the precepts of the law were rendered useless by crafty subterfuges and licentious indulgences. As a contrast to the fashionable theology, which encouraged a superstitious attachment to forms and an uncharitable contempt of the Gentiles, our Lord taught the necessity of inward purity, the subjugation of the passions, and an enlarged benevolence towards all men without any consideration of their country or principles. He inculcated upon his disciples this great truth, that causeless hatred is an offence nearly allied to blood-guiltiness, and that every wanton imagination is equivalent to adultery. From this view of the moral law it followed, that the ordinary practice of divorce on slight pretences was a gross violation of a sacred ordinance, and that the narrow spirit which confined the Divine favour to a particular community was derogatory to His goodness who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." Now the blessing of redemption being no less universal than that of Providence, the Divine Expounder of the mysteries of grace was careful in the beginning to inform his disciples that God is no respecter of persons; and that therefore, laying aside all prejudice arising from education and habits, they must labour alike towards the Jew and the Gentile, friends and enemies; because the salvation of which they were the appointed preachers was the common concern of all the families of the earth. "Be ye therefore perfect," said Jesus, "as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" not that they could hope to rise in any degree to an example beyond all imitation, or that any creature can ever expect to attain absolute perfection; but that, as the dispensers of the word and as the lights of the world, they were to act free from all partiality, being animated by no other sentiment than that of bringing souls to the

knowledge of redemption, and building them up in their holy faith, agreeable to what was afterwards recommended by one of our Lord's principal auditors; "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." 1 Pet. i. 22.



SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Matthew, vi. 34.—*Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

THE great Teacher and Exemplar of all righteousness having laid down the principles necessary to qualify men for an admission into his communion, proceeded to instruct his disciples in those duties upon which peculiar stress was laid by the public professors, but the practice of which they grossly abused by their formality and ostentation. As charity is a virtue most strongly enforced in the law of God, these corrupt expositors resolved the whole obligation of the precept into the mere distribution of alms, which, therefore, they took care to perform in such a manner as to excite general notice and admiration. Our blessed Lord taught a different lesson, and required his followers to consider the cause of the poor in the light of common justice, which accounts the opulent as debtors to the Author of all good, who has made them stewards for their distressed brethren. The man who takes this view of himself, and is sensible that he has nothing but what came from the Divine bounty, will be actuated

by the spirit of disinterested love for his fellow-creatures; and so far from endeavouring to gain the applause of the multitude for his benevolence, he will be careful to bestow his relief with as tender a regard as possible to the wants and feelings of the afflicted object. That liberality which has the world for its motive, must be satisfied with the fleeting praise of men for its reward. In like manner the spirit of prayer, to be effectual for our own benefit and the divine glory, must be conducted in a secret communication between our own hearts and the great Searcher of thoughts; for though the public services of religion are necessary in the way of example and edification, yet is the devotion of each worshipper to be the expression of his own sincere and individual mind, in the way of supplication and thanksgiving. For this reason the disciples were instructed in a particular form, not that this was to be such an absolute rule as to exclude every other which the exigencies of mankind and the circumstances of the church might require, but to establish the general principles of devotional address, as well with respect to the matter as the manner, the spirit, and the language of prayer. In our application to the Throne of Grace, we must lay aside every narrow consideration; and as members of the same family with the whole human race, who have one Father and one Redeemer, we shall, if our affections are rightly placed, be earnestly solicitous for the promotion of universal righteousness in the extension of the Messiah's kingdom, which will induce us to embrace our very enemies in the arms of love, when we pray for the pardon of sin and deliverance from the temptation and dominion of the evil one. As the hypocrites of that day made an uncommon virtue of fasting, which, in appearance, they observed with peculiar rigour, our Lord took care to guard his disciples against practices which, however imposing they

might be in the sight of men, were but solemn mockery in the estimation of God, who requires the subjugation of the passions rather than the torment of the flesh ; and who delights in a cheerful disposition, the result of habitual piety, more than in gloominess of countenance, or even the strictest austerity of life. Having thus cleared three great branches of duty from the abuses with which they were disfigured and rendered abominable, by the corruptions of those who affected superior light and holiness, the Divine Instructor entered into a description of that spiritual mind which aspires above the world, and assimilates itself with the Fountain of intellectual light and moral perfection.

In opposition to those who blended temporal riches and honours with their religion, our Saviour taught his followers to look upon these things as a snare and an incumbrance, which could not be pursued at the same time with the heavenly inheritance to which they were now called. It is, however, to be remarked, that the possession of riches is not prohibited in this place, neither are men censured for labouring in such a way as to raise themselves above the wretchedness of poverty ; but while every just allowance is given to the spirit of enterprize and industry, we are here cautioned not “ to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth.” The obvious meaning of the passage, as applied to the case of the disciples, and to all who bear the Christian name, is this, that whatever may be expedient or necessary for our comfort in this world, must be sought and applied with no other view than the ordinary purposes of life. We may lawfully gain wealth, and appropriate it for the benefit of ourselves and those who are allied to us in blood and friendship ; taking care to maintain a conscience void of all offence in the mode of acquisition, the spirit of enjoyment, and the services to which it is applied. Riches are not to be counted

as the means of happiness, neither are they to be laid up for our own use when they come to us in the course of Providence, and as the reward of our honest exertions; but the vocation in which we are placed must be pursued with a single eye to the glory of God; and all the blessings which we receive from his bounty, to be profitable, must be employed for the welfare of our fellow-creatures. Thus far the exhortation may be considered as of general import, and applicable to believers of all ages and conditions; but what follows was evidently intended for the particular direction of the disciples, who were called to a personal attendance upon our Lord's ministry, and being set apart for an extraordinary purpose, were to cast all their dependence upon Divine grace. Having quitted their occupations and renounced all things in this world for the sake of Christ, it was proper that they should be strengthened and animated by the assurance of support, to free their minds from all anxiety about the maintenance of themselves and their families. Accordingly, their blessed Master took this opportunity of encouraging them in their heavenly course by various reflections, drawn from the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation, and the certainty, that He who provideth for the lowest of the animal tribes, and who gives beauty and fragrance to the plants of the field, will not suffer those to want who are engaged in the execution of his positive commands.

The charge "to take no thought for the morrow," was particularly suitable to the circumstances of men who, like their Lord, were to be without any settled home, and whose time and thoughts were to be wholly employed in the promulgation of the Gospel. Still what was addressed primarily to the first disciples, is also a useful lesson, in a qualified sense, to all who come after them, since nothing is more calculated to weaken the mind and to distract its efforts,

than an anxious solicitude about the time to come, or the fear that our present labours will be inadequate to provide for future wants. The advice of our Saviour, then, though designed to preserve his immediate followers from despondency, and to cheer them in the midst of the evils which surrounded them, will be found of salutary benefit to all who consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims upon the earth; and who, to obtain the prize of their high calling, must press forwards in the path of present duty, equally unmindful of the allurements that would draw them from it, and of the difficulties which may attend their perseverance; knowing that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 8.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Matt. vii. 28, 29.—*When Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.*

THE last division of this incomparable discourse consists of directions for the application of the principles laid down in the former part, so that the power of the Gospel may be made manifest towards all men in the deportment of its followers, particularly those who are called to the office of the ministry. In opposition to the bigoted spirit of the Jews, and the unrighteous judgment of the Pharisees, the disciples of Christ are required to exercise a charitable disposition in their observations of mankind, and to avoid every kind of harsh censure coti-

cerning the character of others, remembering, in their intercourse with the rest of the world, the relation in which they all stand to the common Parent of the universe, and those imperfections in their own temper and conduct which might justly subject them to his displeasure and condemnation. Every man has some errors to correct, and many evils to lament; numerous deficiencies which call for humility, and obstinate habits that stand in need of reformation. It is the duty, therefore, of all persons, without any exception, to be gentle and merciful to their fellow-creatures, knowing how greatly even the most circumspect and upright in this probationary state, fall short of that rectitude which is enjoined in the law of the Most High, and enforced by the voice of conscience. But though the servants of Christ are called upon to live in unity with the various branches of His family, whose tender mercy is over all his works, they are cautioned against the indiscriminate communication of holy things, and an over-zealous concern even for the truth itself, when it is found that their efforts, instead of exciting attention and reverence, only serve to rouse the worst passions of their hearers, and to provoke them to acts of violence. The divine message is indeed of universal import, and the word of life belongs to all orders of men, by virtue of His commission who came to seek and to save those who were lost; but the mysteries of grace are too serious to be trifled with; and when the offer of salvation is made the object of contempt, silence becomes a duty, and the servant of Christ will do well in retiring from the unprofitable scene, agreeable to the advice of his Lord: "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet." **Matt. x. 14.** There should be a limit to our exhortations, lest we do injury to the cause of religion

by our indiscretion, and by a waste of that time which may be usefully bestowed upon more deserving objects ; still the spirit of watchfulness must continue with unabated ardour ; and whether successful or not in the work to which we are appointed, it behoves us to imitate the forbearance of Him who hath called us to it, by pitying the unthankful and praying for their conversion. For this purpose we are directed to take the example of our heavenly Father as an encouragement under all difficulties ; learning from the Divine beneficence to place an entire dependence upon his goodness, and to show in our dealings with other men the same kindness and liberality which we expect to receive from them in every time of need. The sublime rule of "doing unto all men as we would they should do unto us," comprehends the whole system of moral duty contained in the second table of the law, and enforced in the writings of the prophets ; because he that regulates his mind and practice by this universal precept, will be not only amiable in private, but valuable in public life ; being as careful to maintain the relations of society unimpaired, as to keep himself unspotted in the world. Such is the temper which our Lord requires in all his followers, and without which indeed none can be capable of tasting the blessing he came to impart, since the kingdom of the Messiah consists of an abstraction from the cares and vanities of time, and an habitual preparation for that refined state of intellectual enjoyment which man forfeited when he became the slave of his passions and the dupe of ambition. The Redeemer informs his followers, that, to be made partakers of that eternal inheritance which he came to restore, they must be emptied of every corrupt inclination and sensual desire ; studying daily to have their wills cleared from earthly affection, and passing through the world as men absolutely,

weaned from its attractions. In this pilgrimage, however, it is impossible that any man can proceed far, nor is it fit that he should, without encountering many trials for the exercise of his virtue; the believer, therefore, must expect to meet with numerous deceivers, who will endeavour to pervert him from the right way by various allurements, clothing themselves even in the garb of righteousness, to draw the unwary into their wiles, as the author of all evil occasionally transforms himself, for the same purpose, into the appearance of an angel of light. As what a man hears will generally have some effect upon the turn of his sentiments, it is not a matter of indifferent moment what teachers he attends, nor is it a mark of grace or wisdom to run after new instructors, as if the Gospel stood in need of illustration, and the sagacity of man was requisite to explain the mystery of godliness. This debertation against false prophets was not more necessary in the apostolical age, fertile as that was in such deluders, than it is in this advanced state of Christian knowlege, when the pride of reason makes man impatient of submission, and anxious to expatiate in a larger field than that which is prescribed in His word who requires us to nail our judgment upon his cross, and to follow him in all humility through the valley of the shadow of death to the gates of immortality. Of such men as are inflated with the desire of distinguishing themselves by being wise above what is written, He hath told us to beware; which denotes that the only way to escape the poison of their principles is to keep out of the sphere of contagion. By this act of prudence we shall not only preserve our minds from the pernicious influence of error, but contribute essentially to the benefit of others by our example; and to the detection of fraud, by not suffering its professors to avail themselves of our countenance and good nature in covering their arts and extravagance.

To this caution against those who should arise and sow divisions in his church, our Divine Master added this solemn declaration, which it becomes every member of that community carefully to regard, that no claim to superior grace and zeal, knowledge and purity, will be admitted as an excuse for the breach of his commandments. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." As the summary of the whole body of practical instruction contained in this course of lectures, delivered to the first believers in Christ for their government, and to form the ground-work of their own teaching, our Lord concluded with a parabolical description of two characters, exemplifying what had just been laid down in their different behaviour; the one building his house upon a rock, which preserved it from the fury of the elements; while the other, trusting to a smooth and pleasant situation, erected his fabrick upon the sand, and perished with it in the hour of trial and temptation. In this picture we perceive the opposite effects of that faith which worketh by love; and that which has the form of godliness, but is destitute of the power of it; for while the one endureth unmoved all the assaults of the enemy, and stands firm amidst the fluctuations of the world, the other is rent with every blast; and on being solicited by corruption, or threatened with persecution, it falls to rise no more.

When these lectures were finished, the astonished auditors expressed their admiration of the awakening truths which they had heard; for the discourses of our Lord, unlike the subtle but useless interpretations of the Scribes, came home to the consciences of men, teaching them so to examine themselves by the law, in the spirit and power of it, as to glorify God by their works, and edify the world by their

example ; for “ a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE LEPER CLEANSED.

Matt. viii. 3.—*I will: be thou clean.*

AMONG the various maladies to which the body of man is subject, hardly any was held in such abhorrence by the ancients as the leprosy. This loathsome disease, which was more severe and disgusting in Syria than in Europe, cut off the unhappy patient from the endearments of his friends, and exiled him from the pleasures of society. The regulations appointed in the Levitical law for the management of persons so afflicted, were constructed with a tender regard for the miserable objects and a prudent care of the public welfare. In committing the direction of the lepers to the watchful attention of the ministers of religion, who were to separate them from the rest of the people for the general good, the duty of humanity was happily blended with the principle of self-preservation ; and while the unfortunate were alienated from the promiscuous intercourse of men, they were not left destitute of temporal and spiritual comfort. Hope, the last refuge of the miserable, was kept alive by the consideration, that the divine institutes held out the prospect of a cure, even in the most deplorable cases ; on which account certain means were to be adopted for the examination of all who lay under this dreadful visitation. Still, however, in the mildest instances of leprosy, the process of recovery was slow and the regimen strict ; the symptoms required a close inspection and the most rigid attention

to cleanliness, though little reliance was placed upon medical skill, and no remedies were known that could even arrest the progress of the disorder, much less eradicate it in obstinate circumstances. Three instances only of a miraculous removal of the leprosy are recorded in the Old Testament; one in the case of Moses, upon whom the malady was inflicted suddenly and healed instantaneously, as a sign to assure him of the Divine protection and assistance in his mission; the next was in the judgment passed upon Miriam for her sedition; and the last was the remarkable cure of Naaman; but in both these instances an instrumental course was taken to relieve the distressed objects, the first being shut out of the camp according to the forms of the law, and the Syrian general was commanded to dip himself seven times in Jordan. Our Lord informs us that there were many lepers in Israel at the time when this last miracle was performed, yet to none of them was the prophet sent with the power of healing; which was owing not to any deficiency in his supernatural gifts, or the want of inclination to do good, but solely to the national infidelity. It is observable, that when the Redeemer came upon earth, the persons labouring under this calamity were more than commonly numerous, since many who were thus afflicted experienced his goodness; and in his answer to the inquiry of John, he adduced this as one proof of his divine character, that by him the "lepers were cleansed." The first instance of this kind in the history of Jesus happened immediately after his sermon on the mount; for on his journey from thence to Capernaum a man full of leprosy worshipped him, and said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." This confession, and the act with which it was attended, plainly proved the faith of the afflicted object in the divinity of the Person whom he addressed; regarding Jesus not merely as a messenger come from

God, but as being himself the Lord of nature, upon whose volition alone all things depended ; who could at his simple pleasure cause the mass of blood to regain its purity, and restore the whole system to its wonted health and vigour. The faith of the leper was the more extraordinary, because this was at an early period of our Lord's ministry ; and though he certainly had wrought some great cures in that country, yet no case like the present appears to have been in the number. This poor man, however, was not to be deterred by shame on account of his disgusting appearance, nor by any doubt of the Saviour's power and benevolence. He knew that nothing more was needful than a devout application on his part, and the will to relieve him on that of Jesus ; to whom, therefore, he came with a heart full of anxiety, yet submissive to the righteous determination of Him whom he acknowledged to be his Lord. That the language of the leper indicated his persuasion of the essential deity of Christ, and that it was approved of as such, is evident from the answer which it received, " I will ; be thou clean." In the whole of this transaction we perceive, that as the afflicted man relied entirely upon the will of the Redeemer, and not upon his holiness or intercession ; so Jesus by his word and his action fully confirmed the belief of the leper, who sought his aid, and thereby taught the spectators of the miracle that he had an absolute inherent controul over all things, as being the Creator and Lord of the universe. The manner in which he healed this miserable creature afforded also a beautiful lesson of charity and tenderness ; for he not only said, " I will ; be thou clean," but he touched the polluted object with his hand, thus giving a demonstrative proof of his own divine power, an assurance of the certainty of the cure, and an example of love and compassion to all his followers. It is true, we are not required to run heedlessly in the way of con-

tagion, or to show a stoical indifference to the evils of life; but when the calamities of our brethren call for our assistance, it becomes us to lay aside all false delicacy, and in the exercise of humanity to cast ourselves implicitly upon His protecting grace, “who forgiveth all our iniquities; who healeth all our spiritual diseases; who redeemeth our lives from destruction; and who crowneth us with loving kindness and tender mercies.” Ps. ciii. 3, 4.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE BELIEVING CENTURION.

Matt. viii. 10.—*Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no nor in Israel.*

THIS encomium was pronounced by our blessed Saviour upon the military commander at Capernaum, in consequence of the declaration made by that officer when Jesus kindly proposed to come and heal his servant, or rather his son, who lay at the point of death. The centurion being informed of the miracles which had been performed by this wonderful Person, conceived the highest idea of his dignity and goodness; and judging, no doubt, that the Jewish priests and magistrates must entertain similar sentiments, he prevailed upon them to join with him in this application. There was, however, a wide difference between this proselyte and the teachers of Israel; for the one humbled himself before Jesus with profound reverence, acknowledging his utter unworthiness to partake of his bounty; while the others solicited or rather demanded the favour in his behalf, merely because “he loved their nation, and had built them a synagogue.” Of the charitable acts and moral qualities of this Roman they made no mention, but

rested their sole recommendation of his request upon the distinguished partiality which he had shown for their community, and the extraordinary instance he had given of it in founding, at his entire charge, a place of worship among them. The centurion himself was far from assuming any merit on these accounts, but presented his petition with the greatest humility, rather as an abject sinner in the presence of his Lord, than a man of high station in the province where he resided.

Most men would have gladly hailed the offer which was made by Jesus to visit them when they wanted his assistance for such a purpose; and even common courtesy, it might be thought, would have dictated the welcome reception of so remarkable a guest at any time, and under any circumstances. Instead of this, we find the centurion, contrary to the common usages of polished society, declining the proposal which had been made to him, and declaring his unfitness to entertain the gracious Person on whose aid he relied for the recovery of his sick favourite. Now as there was nothing in the outward appearance of our Saviour that could impress the mind of the spectator with so much awe, and as the liberality of the officer stands attested by a very remarkable evidence, it may be matter of surprize that he should have made any difficulty at all of accepting the intended visit; and yet it seems still more strange that this act of self-denial is the very point alleged to prove his exalted faith. "Lord," said the centurion, "I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed: for I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say unto this man, Go, and he goeth; and unto another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." On hearing this profession, Jesus is said to have marvelled, not that he felt any emotion arising from

an unexpected discovery, for he knew what was in the human heart, and needed no information to ascertain the characters of men; but he marked his public admiration of such an uncommon instance of piety in a stranger, that the people around him might make a proper improvement of the example, and learn the nature of that faith which is indispensibly requisite to the enjoyment of the Gospel privileges, and without which no one, whatever may be his pretensions, can be a member of the kingdom of God. The confession of the centurion did in fact amount to a full admission of our Lord's absolute divinity, or it was not such an instance of faith as can be properly said to have exceeded any that had been witnessed in Israel, since, among other cases, we find Nicodemus, at his very first introduction, thus addressing Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles which thou doest except God be with him." Yet we are told by the highest authority, that the faith of this Roman transcended all that had as yet appeared in the course of our Saviour's ministry; whence we must conclude, that this extraordinary man did not only acknowledge Christ to be the greatest of prophets, which other men believed at that time as well as himself, but also that he was truly the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. This he illustrated by an apt analogy drawn from his own peculiar situation and profession; for, as he inferred, if he could make his orders be obeyed in different directions at the same time, how much more powerful must be His will who caused the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak, who opened the eyes of the blind and changed the corrupt humours of the body, merely at his command? Rightly judging that nothing short of Omnipotence could be equal to the works which our Lord had wrought, this exalted foreigner, unlike the Jews among whom he

dwelt, contemplated with the deepest humility the manifestation of the Divine Nature in the flesh; and this it was which induced him to speak in such lowly terms of himself, while he continued to supplicate the blessing of Jesus for the afflicted member of his family. The honourable attestation borne by our Saviour to the faith of the centurion, shows that this was the true sense of the declaration which he made, for his conduct is put in opposition to that of the whole Jewish nation; and certain it is, that then the proper divinity of Christ, as well as the spiritual nature of his redemption, was far from being understood even by his own disciples. Let us then turn this history to our edification, by looking to Jesus as the centurion did, with an implicit reliance upon the plenitude of his power and willingness to save all who come to him for the pardon of their sins. If thus we seek him, he will assuredly be found of us; and the lower we esteem ourselves in his sight, the more strongly will he set his love upon us, by causing the light of his countenance to shine upon our hearts, while the still small voice of his "Spirit witnesseth with our spirits, that we are now through his grace and righteousness become the children of God." Rom. viii. 16.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE TEMPEST STILLED.

Matt. viii. 27.—But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

THE miracles of our Lord were for the most part of a prophetic nature, being descriptive of circumstances connected with the establishment of his

church, or predictive of events which should befall it till the consummation of all things. This appears in the striking instance of faith which we have been already considering, and in the extraordinary scene to which our attention is now directed. In the former we behold an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and from the covenant of promise, shaking off his national prejudices, and renouncing his superstitious practices, to embrace the religion of a people despised by the polished Greeks and Romans, and going far beyond even the most pious of the Jews themselves in his views of the Messiah. While the believing centurion exhibited a lively figure of the Gentile world, who received Christ with gladness, and readily submitted to him as the Lord of Life, they who enjoyed the Divine Oracles in complete perfection, and who heard the sound of salvation delivered by the Eternal Word, treated it with cold indifference, and slighted the miracles of Jesus because they were not wrought for the purposes of temporal grandeur and political deliverance. Even the very disciples who had a near connexion with the person of the Redeemer, they who heard his instructions and beheld his works, were for a long time infatuated with the same delusion, and had but very faint conceptions of the real dignity of their heavenly Master. The Roman commander was persuaded that one who could heal inveterate diseases without the use of means, must possess an absolute dominion over all nature; but the followers of Jesus, on the contrary, limited their ideas of his power and goodness to a narrower sphere, and had scarcely any higher expectation than that of seeing the "kingdom at this time restored unto Israel."

To correct their erroneous notions of redemption, to prepare their minds for a season of trouble, and to enlarge their faith in the Saviour, they were directed to embark on board a vessel at Capernaum,

and to make the best of their way across the lake, which at this place was nearly at its greatest breadth. It was late in the evening when they quitted the port ; and as the night came on, a furious wind arose, which caused the billows to swell with extraordinary violence : but while all the hands were employed for the general safety, and every heart beat with anxiety, Jesus was asleep. This insensibility to the danger in which they were all involved, must have appeared very unaccountable to the disciples, but none of them attempted to rouse him from his pillow during the greater part of the storm ; for so long as any hopes remained, they all exerted themselves with commendable industry against the conflicting elements, and in endeavouring to reach the desired haven. When, however, their efforts failed to preserve the vessel, and she began to sink, the people, alarmed at their perilous condition, awoke him, saying, “ Lord, save us, we perish.”

The reproof which they experienced might seem unreasonably severe, considering their laborious perseverance and hopeless situation ; but when we reflect that their language was that of despair, we may well censure those men for their want of faith, who had profited so little by their intercourse with Jesus, as to have been unmindful of his works and to have forgotten his counsel, “ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Though they had seen this gracious declaration abundantly confirmed in the relief of persons much less familiarized to our Lord's goodness than themselves, yet in the time of need they gave up all for lost, and, even in the presence of their Master, they sunk into a state of wretched despondency. They either regarded his lethargy as a proof of his indifference, or the elemental conflict as above his controul ; for which reason he rebuked them in terms proportioned to their abuse of the privileges

conferred upon them, and the high office to which they were called in the church. By this correction, and the miracle which followed, Jesus gave the most unequivocal proof of his dominion over all the powers of nature, and demonstrated that his will is not subject to any contingencies. The reflection produced by this wonderful transaction upon the minds of those who beheld it, plainly expressed the weakness of their religious principles, and the little progress which they had made in the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; for, when the storm ceased, "the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"

It is well observed by one of the early fathers, that "the little ship tossed up and down in the midst of the sea, represented the Christian church, which suffers affliction and persecution in this world as long as her Lord, to appearance, is asleep; seeming patiently to overlook it, till being awakened by the prayers of the saints, in the latter days, he shall check the storm, and restore tranquillity to his faithful servants*." This is the right explanation of the miracle, in which, as the quick transition from ungovernable fury to calm tranquillity clearly indicated the Divine agency, so the deliverance of the church from the rage of her enemies was evidently owing to the restraining influence of her gracious Lord, who still protects her in every difficulty, and is steadily conducting the scheme of salvation to its ultimate object. Short-sighted and feeble mortals may in the darkness of the tempest be apt to fear that the Almighty hath abandoned his people, and given them up for a prey into the hands of the mighty; but to the whole spiritual community, and to every living member of it, the voice of the Redeemer thus speaks, even in the most turbulent

* Tertullian de Baptismo, c. 22.

and afflicting scene, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Heb. xiii. 5. In the midst of distress and persecution, whether brought on by their own fears or the malice of the world, the little flock are safe while they remain united to their Divine Head, whose grace will be felt most effectually when all human hope is lost, and that voice shall be heard with gladness, "which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." Psalm lxxv. 7.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE GADARENE DEMONIACS.

Matt. viii. 29.—*Behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?*

AMONG the numerous evidences given by our Saviour of his Divine power, one of the most astonishing was that of his casting out evil spirits from the bodies of men; but though he adduced these miraculous instances in proof of his authority, and his enemies ascribed them to diabolical agency, some critics and commentators have preposterously endeavoured to reduce the cases of the demoniacs to the class of ordinary diseases. But unfortunately for the credit of these interpreters, the disorders healed by Jesus are so distinctly marked in the narration of them as to be characterized without difficulty, even at this distance of time, and notwithstanding the vast improvements which have taken place in medical science; while the circumstances of the possessed persons, who were so wondrously relieved, cannot be explained by any known principles of physiology

without doing the utmost violence to language, and perverting the simplicity of the Gospel to the false taste of rhetorical declamation. The Evangelists are remarkable for a studied brevity of style, and that plainness of phraseology which, proceeding from the consciousness of the truth of what is related, gives the facts as they occurred, and leaves the impression to the reader. In no instance do these writers make use of art to set off their subject, or adopt the aid of figurative illustration to magnify the actions of their Master. It cannot, therefore, be supposed that in one particular description of maladies they should so far have departed from their wonted course as to embody human infirmities under the most terrible forms, by representing Frenzy and Melancholy as beings endowed with knowledge and speech, will and motion. Yet so extravagantly must the sacred historians have acted, if, as some modern reasoners contend, their relations of the demoniacs are to be considered as nothing more than the highly finished and emblematic delineation of mental diseases. But were the comment to be allowed, still some unaccountable, and, in reality, the most inexplicable difficulties, will remain; for it may be questioned how it was possible that persons so afflicted with the loss of their reason should in the midst of that dreadful privation be able to recognize Jesus, and pay him homage in his Divine character as the Son of God? There is yet another particular which will require a satisfactory solution, on the ground, that if these complaints were mere natural disorders, how could they pass out of the afflicted persons into the bodies of irrational animals? Every thing related of these mysterious visitations prevents us from acceding to such an hypothesis, because, by embracing it, more embarrassments will arise to perplex our faith than any which are at present involved in the literal story. This will more clearly appear in the won-

derful occurrence which happened to our Lord soon after his landing in the country of the Gergesenes, near the city of Gadara, whose inhabitants were partly Jews and partly heathen Syrians, which circumstance accounts for the number of swine kept in that district; the same being an article of traffic, for the purposes of supplying the Roman settlers with food for themselves and sacrifices to their idols. The mountains which stretched along this shore abounded with large caverns, originally excavated for sepulchral uses; but which were also frequently made the retreats of robbers, and were sometimes chosen as places of retirement by persons who were disgusted with the world. These repositories of the dead, at the time when Jesus travelled that way, after crossing the lake, were rendered peculiarly fearful to passengers, by harbouring two wretched outcasts from society, who, impelled by diabolical influence, continually tormented themselves, and spread terror among all who lived in that neighbourhood. The other Evangelists, in relating this incident, mention only one demoniac; but St. Matthew expressly says there were two of them; and this apparent inconsistency may be easily explained, by supposing that the unhappy persons stood in some near connexion, and most probably in such a degree of mutual dependence as to make their history the same. We are told, that when the principal of these men "beheld Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him;" a circumstance deserving of especial observation, for it was not only contrary to his wonted hostile practice, but is totally irreconcilable to the principle, that his disorder consisted of that perversion of intellect which is commonly termed madness. Had this been the utmost of the man's disorder, he would have wanted discernment to notice with respect One who was an utter stranger in those parts; and even allowing as much as possible to the wayward

caprices of insanity, nothing short of supernatural direction could have made this wretched being acquainted with the person of the Redeemer, or have drawn forth this strong confession, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come to torment us before the time?" Here is not only a full acknowledgement of the Messiah's divinity, but an avowal of the great work in which he was engaged, and to which the trembling speaker now looked with equal certainty and dread. To place the reality of this awful possession beyond all doubt, our Saviour entered into a discourse with the chief agent, who therefore could not have been a lunatic, since with one of that pitiable description the compassionate Jesus would hardly have held any conversation till the faculty of judgment was restored to its proper exercise, and the patient was made sensible of the blessing which had been conferred upon him.

But the parties in this remarkable colloquy were of a quality very different from what appeared to the persons who witnessed this extraordinary transaction. Clothed in human nature, as the promised Seed, stood the Eternal Word, who took upon him our infirmities, that he might release us from the dominion of the evil one; while before him lay, in the bodies of the demoniacs, the powers of darkness; thus for a time exercising their rage against the works of God, and presenting an affecting picture of man in his fallen state, debased by sin and a slave to the tempter. That our Lord should inquire the name of the demon with whom he had this discourse, is not the least remarkable part of the concern; for it shows, in opposition to the figurative interpretation of the miracle, that the sensory of the principal sufferer was acted upon by a spiritual being of considerable authority over others, endowed with various powers, but actuated by the same hellish malignity, "My name is Legion," replied the apostate leader,

“for we are many;” by which is to be understood an indefinite number; showing the extent of the mischief occasioned by the lapse of man, and the multiplied means of advancing the dominion of Satan in the world. The request of the evil spirits for permission to go into the swine has been made the subject of much speculation; but if we reflect upon the condition of mankind at this period, and bear in mind the mighty scene which was now unfolding on the great moral theatre, we shall find that the influence of the enemy of righteousness was then uncommonly prevalent, not only among the Heathen, but even in that family to whom were committed the oracles and promises of God. That usurpation, however, was now drawing to a termination, and the devils knew it; they were sensible that their sphere of action was about to undergo a considerable limitation, and that the Gentiles, over whom they exercised a monstrous sway, would soon receive the light of the Gospel, and be made partakers of Divine grace. The unfortunate persons who were at this time the subjects of their malignity, represented the great divisions of mankind, by whom the fallen angels were not only received, but actually worshipped under various denominations, and with many unclean and inhuman services. But no sooner do the deluded children of men see and submit to the Saviour, though it be afar off, than the might of the tyrant ceases, and his squadrons lose their power of tormenting them. These formidable beings are glad to hasten from his presence, and to seek as it were a retreat from Omnipotence in places and creatures, which, according to their depraved understandings, are too vile for his scrutiny. The affliction which oppressed these Gadarenes, and the manner in which they were relieved, teach us that no sins, however heinous or numerous, are any obstacle to the Divine mercy, provided we come to the Saviour, confessing

our misery, acknowledging his sovereignty, and, by submitting our wills wholly unto him, deprive the adversary of all ascendancy over our minds, thus compelling him and all his filthy attendants to flee from us; "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Ephes. vi. 12.

SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-NINTH.

THE CASE OF THE PARALYTIC.

Matt. ix. 5.—*Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee? or to say, Arise and walk?*

AN intense pursuit of gain is apt to produce that sordid disposition, which is equally insensible to judgments and mercies; being as careless of the terrors of the Lord as ungrateful for his favours. This was the character of the Gadarenes, who were dismayed by the signal display of the Divine power, in the deliverance of their two countrymen from the tyranny of the evil spirits; but instead of regarding the Saviour with the veneration due to his high dignity, so eminently manifested in the miracle which he had just wrought among them, these people were alarmed for their property; and having more concern for their traffic than their souls, they servilely besought Jesus to leave the country. This was the base return which the mercenary inhabitants of that region made to One who had freed them from an awful visitation, and enabled travellers to pass the mountains in safety. But the loss of their swine was a grievance which they could not easily excuse, though they well knew that this employment was

contrary to the spirit of religion, and the direct violation of an express statute. The Gadarenes would no doubt have rejoiced in the recovery of the afflicted persons, especially as the calamity under which they laboured rendered them objects of dread in those parts; but the conclusion of the miracle was accounted as the infliction of a punishment; for which reason the people, who were not willing to abandon their illegal calling, and were yet fearful of experiencing a heavier chastisement, desired our Lord to depart from their coasts, as though his presence among them had been injurious to their interests. Accordingly Jesus passed over to the other side of the sea of Tiberias; and at Capernaum, such was the curiosity excited by his works and his preaching, that the house in which he abode was rendered inaccessible in the ordinary way, owing to the pressure of the crowds for admittance. Another Evangelist informs us, that "as he was teaching there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who came out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem;" which circumstance shows the extent of his fame at this time, not only as a person who wrought many mighty deeds; but as one who taught the most powerful truths, in a strain of captivating eloquence. The hearers of our Lord were not made up of the ignorant and credulous part of the community, though even the simplest capacities were far from being overlooked in his ministry; but the expounders of the law, and the appointed instructors of the people, came from various quarters to scrutinize his conduct and to examine his doctrine. In this assembly of rigid inquirers the "power of the Lord was present in a remarkable manner, for the healing of diseases;" but while these men enjoyed the fullest opportunity of improvement, their hearts remained unchanged by the doctrines which they heard and the blessings which they saw. As a contrast to their

callous dispositions and obstinate infidelity, an instance occurred which served to show the power of faith in minds little prepared by study, but convinced of the Divine goodness from the testimony of experience; and resolved to make a trial of it without troubling themselves about questions of difficulty, or delaying the execution of their design out of respect to the opinions of the world. Among other afflicted objects who sought the compassion of the Redeemer at Capernaum, was one that had lost the use of his limbs; and this breathing corpse, as he might properly enough be called, was so totally divested of all motion, that his friends were obliged to carry him on a couch; but finding no entrance by the door, they did not on that account give up the case as hopeless, or consider themselves as having done all that duty required of them. Some would have suggested the propriety of waiting for a more convenient season; others, the indecorum of forcing their way into the presence of a stranger, at that time engaged in an important discourse; while another, perhaps, might have very reasonably recommended the more easy mode of sending a messenger to Jesus, with an affecting statement of the poor creature's misery. But these benevolent men were too ardent in the cause of humanity to listen to any such proposals; and fearful that delay might be fatal to the object of their solicitude, they had recourse to an extraordinary measure, which was no less than that of conveying their sick brother and his couch, by the steps which led outside of the house to the roof, and then letting the patient down through the opening into the interior, placing him directly in the presence of Jesus. This act of faith, which may truly be said to have worked by love, seems to have come before our Lord at the very moment when he was engaged in explaining to his fastidious auditors the doctrine of salvation by a Mediator, in opposition to their re-

liance, for justification, upon an outward conformity to the law. That such was the nature of this conference, may be gathered from the language made use of in the cure of the paralytic : " Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee." The remission of sins had not, to appearance, any connexion with the remedy of the evil under which the man laboured, nor was it immediately followed by the restoration of health to the cripple. The declaration, therefore, was intended to confirm what had before been advanced, and to prove that the same power which was now employed in removing the temporal maladies of mankind, was that alone by which the sinner can obtain life to his soul. The Pharisees, however, were shocked at the high assumption of One whom they regarded as no more than a mortal, and thus they reasoned, or rather murmured, in their hearts : " Why doth this person speak blasphemies ? who can forgive sins but God only ?" These reasoners judged rightly enough, that as sin is an offence against Infinite Holiness, the pardon of it belongs only to the Deity ; and that no creature, however pure or exalted, can assert that prerogative without doing injury to the Divine attributes. But when our Saviour gave his hearers this occasion to wonder at the boldness of his pretensions, he fully proved his authority to absolve sinners, by exposing the malignant thoughts of the Scribes, and instantly commanding the paralytic to rise up and walk. Thus the divinity of Jesus was made evident by his omniscience, in searching the hearts of men, and confirming the truth of his word by an act little short of a resurrection from the dead. It is true, many miracles had been wrought in former ages, by a Divine commission, but those of our Saviour were of a higher nature, and performed by his own absolute will ; uniting the salvation of the soul with the

restoration of the bodily faculties. This was more than what any of the prophets had presumed to do ; and therefore the Pharisees could not endure that One, whose origin and connexions were known, should lay claim to a distinction which raised him above Moses, and clothed him with the majesty of the Most High. The evil which prevailed in their hearts was that of infidelity, proceeding from their narrow prejudices, and refusing to acknowledge the Son of God when he condescended to give them every evidence of his exalted character and essential divinity. The reasoning of these men was therefore turned effectually to their own condemnation ; for Jesus proved his right to the privilege which he maintained, by "commanding the sick of the palsy to take up his bed and go to his house." This was done for the confusion of the gainsayers, and to comfort believers with the assurance, that "the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Such was the declaration of our Lord himself, when he rebuked his opponents, and sent the paralytic home, rejoicing more in his spiritual than in his bodily cure. The case of this distressed object affords an affecting picture of human nature in its fallen state, corrupt in all its faculties, having only the lineaments of its original creation, but utterly incapable of walking before God, till the judgment of sin is turned away, and its moral powers are invigorated by Divine grace to pursue that course which leads the redeemed home to their Father's house. Such was the defiled and helpless condition of mankind when the Son of God came into the world, that he might destroy the works of the devil, and bring in everlasting righteousness for those who were dead in trespasses and sins. They who have been made partakers of this redemption, will discover their zeal for the Divine glory, by compassionating the wretched state of their fellow-creatures, and by endeavouring to

relieve them from their spiritual bondage, as the friends of the paralytic showed their faith and affection in his behalf, even when all appearances seemed to be combined against them; for this is the great criterion to try the sincerity of our Christian principles, according to the rule laid down by the Spirit; "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother abideth in death." 1 John, iii. 14.

SEPTEMBER THE THIRTIETH.

THE ISSUE OF BLOOD.

Matt. ix. 22.—*But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.*

THIS is one of those miraculous cures in which great efficacy is ascribed to the power of faith by the Divine Person, who restored health to the sick, strength to the lame, and sight to the blind. By this virtue is to be understood not a naked assent to credible testimony, much less the operation of an eager imagination, which believes without inquiry, and takes things upon trust, merely because they are agreeable to its feelings and conformable to its apprehensions. The objects of our Lord's kindness and commendation were persuaded that he was able to relieve all who came unto him; and that no case, however hopeless in appearance and distressing to the afflicted, was beyond the reach of his sovereign grace. They knew that men in high authority, and who were venerated for their superior wisdom and sanctity, looked upon him with contempt, and treated him as an impostor. They were also aware,

that to acknowledge him to be the Messiah was such an offence to the ruling powers, as subjected those who made that confession to the sentence of excommunication, with all its dreadful consequences. Notwithstanding these obstacles, we find many afflicted creatures setting aside all doubt of success and fear of trouble, to lay themselves and their sufferings before the Redeemer. Instead of considering their particular misery as too obstinate for recovery, or being alarmed by the terrors of excommunication, these children of sorrow were fully assured of the divinity of Jesus, and therefore they came to him in an implicit reliance upon his goodness, without being awed by the influence of the great, or affected by the opinion of the world. Thus also must every one that is sensible of the evil of sin, and who knows that without an infinite atonement it must end in eternal death, apply to the Redeemer, with an entire dependence upon his mercy and a full confidence in his power to save all who come unto God by him. When we are thoroughly brought to a sense of our defiled condition and its dreadful consequences, the fear of men will cease to have any effect upon our minds, and no idea of temporal danger will hinder us from adopting the only course that is left for our recovery. Like the woman in the Gospel, we shall be the more anxious to obtain an interest in the great salvation, which is treasured up in Jesus Christ for all who believe, when we reflect upon the length of time that has been wasted in unprofitable pursuits; and upon the numerous disappointments experienced by us in our search after happiness. This afflicted object had laboured twelve years under a distressing malady, for the removal of which she had expended all her substance upon physicians; but instead of deriving any benefit from their prescriptions, she grew worse; and, indeed, considering the nature of the complaint, her continuance under it for so

long a space was of itself little short of miraculous. Here there was a striking representation of the great body of the Gentile world, who had the form of life, but were utterly destitute of the power of it; and among all the variety of systems which divided the opinions of men, not one was found that could give any ease to the burthened conscience, or open the prospect of immortality. But here was also a still more affecting picture of every sinner, whose conscience being roused by his miserable condition, seeks for rest and findeth none, from the tyranny of reflection; while a perception of the flux of life brings with it every hour new apprehensions of the terrors of eternity. To all who are in such a state, the conduct of this woman affords a lesson of instruction; and the blessing which she met with is an encouragement for them to follow the footsteps of the Saviour in the path of holy duty; waiting upon him in his ordinances, and endeavouring to obtain from him an answer of peace, that through him they are the children of God. This poor enfeebled creature was not to be diverted from her purpose by the reflection, that our Lord was then engaged in another benevolent mission; nor did the pressure of the crowd alarm her fears, and prevent her from going after him with all the strength which she could exert; for thus she reasoned with herself, Though I have no chance of staying him in his progress, of engaging his attention to my deplorable case, yet "if I can but touch the hem of his garment I shall be made whole." Leaving, therefore, the idle and the curious to their own eager observation and desire of beholding new miracles, this patient believer was content to move slowly onwards, with her eyes continually directed to Jesus, and her mind occupied by the consideration of her own necessities. In the same spirit of humility and perseverance will all true penitents, who have in themselves the sentence

of condemnation on account of their iniquities, "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," knowing that "he is the way, and the truth, and the life." These enlightened ones do not run hastily to show their zeal, nor do they stop to hear the opinions of others upon a matter which is of infinite moment to their own welfare; much less are they to be deterred by the fashion of the world, or disheartened by the delay which Divine Wisdom may judge fitting to permit for the trial of their faith and the exercise of their patience. They go on stedfastly, though in much weakness, and with the fixed resolution of submitting themselves entirely to the dispensation of Him whose will is perfect righteousness, and whose promise is our surest rule, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. xi. 28. The woman, on being healed, did not retire silently from the place, but when Jesus turned about and said, "Who touched me?" she came forward, and, falling at his feet, acknowledged what she had done and the benefit which she had received. In making this inquiry, which appeared very extraordinary to the disciples, our Lord intended to confirm the cure that had been wrought, to set forth this instance of piety as an example worthy of imitation, and above all to show what it really was that had drawn this virtue from his person. "Daughter," said the benevolent Redeemer, "thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." Mark, v. 34. This wonderful effect, therefore, was not owing to any peculiar property in his body, which communicated its occult qualities to his garments, for many who had a frequent and near access to his person still continued in their disordered state, because they wanted the principle which induced this wretched object to leave her dwelling, for the purpose of casting herself wholly upon the power and goodness of the Saviour. Thus

there are still multitudes who appear as the followers of Christ in the communion of his church, and yet neither their tempers nor their manners are perceptibly affected by the connexion, for this obvious reason, because they have not been convinced of their sin and misery, but, fancying themselves capable of meriting the Divine favour by their morality, they despise that righteousness which is of faith. Not so the real penitent, who feeling the malignity of his disease, and knowing his utter inability to perform what is good and acceptable in the sight of God, abandons every thing else to hear Him who "came to seek and to save those who were lost;" and having found him in his word and ordinances, continues to wait with all humility and diligence for the pardon of sin and the influence of grace; being guided in all circumstances by that which animated the mind of the Apostle: "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philip. i. 21.

OCTOBER THE FIRST.

INFIDELITY OF THE JEWS.

Matt. ix. 35.—And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom; and healing every sickness, and every disease, among the people.

CONSIDERING the mighty works performed by our Lord, the purity of his life, and his unparalleled eloquence, the liberality of his disposition, and his unwearied exertions in doing good, it certainly must seem very strange to the reader of his eventful history, that so extraordinary a person should have been rejected by the people to whom he ministered, and

who at this very period were in expectation of the promised Messiah. It is a matter worthy of inquiry how men, with the volume of the law and the prophets in their hands, and such convincing evidence before their eyes, could refuse to acknowledge the divine mission of Christ, though the excellence of his character and the benevolent nature of his marvellous actions drew from them this confession, "He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." Mark, vii. 37. This very chapter, which contains the relation of the most stupendous deeds, far surpassing any that are recorded to have been wrought by the ancient messengers of God, presents us also with an explanation of the causes why Jesus was not received by those who heard his doctrine and witnessed his miracles. Of the crowds that continually gathered around him, the far greater part were actuated by no better motive than an idle spirit of curiosity, resembling that of the Athenians, whose desire to hear and see something new, gave them a proverbial distinction among their neighbours. The Jews who followed our Lord were very eager to behold some fresh display of his power; but when the sign was over, they contented themselves with expressing their astonishment in the vulgar language of comparison, rather than that of inquiry and improvement. "It was never so seen in Israel," said these stupid wonderers; and with that exclamation their admiration ceased, till the occurrence of some other novelty attracted their notice and furnished matter of conversation. These very persons had observed maladies so obstinate as to be incurable by natural means, removed instantaneously by a secret virtue proceeding from the Redeemer; they also knew that he had raised the dead to life, while the watchers and other attendants treated him with indecent ridicule for presuming to give an encouraging promise to the friends of the deceased;—

they had besides seen two blind men restored to sight, in answer to their profession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God, though these objects of his compassion could not have the testimony of their own senses for the truth which they believed;—and finally, our Lord had just shown his absolute authority over all the orders of created intelligence, by delivering an unhappy young man from the tyrannical fury of an evil spirit. Such were the signs exhibited to this corrupt generation; and yet the more they were multiplied, and the higher they rose in dignity, they had no other effect upon the mass of the people than that of strengthening their narrow prejudices in favour of a temporal deliverer, and the establishment of a splendid monarchy. It was in vain that this Divine Teacher “preached the Gospel of the kingdom,” to minds so deeply lost to all that was truly great and sublime in the mystery of godliness, as to make the promise of universal salvation an instrument to foster ambition, and those carnal views which are equally adverse to the dictates of morality and the principles of religion. The Jewish nation adhered with inflexible ardour to the notion, that the magnificent things spoken of in their Sacred Books concerning the reign of the Messiah, were to be realized in a literal sense; that Jerusalem was to be the praise of all the earth under his government, and that the conquests to be gained by this Prince, were wholly intended for the permanent security of the seed of Jacob in their paternal land. With such contracted sentiments as these, it cannot at all be surprizing that the people ran hastily to behold the miracles of Jesus, since the mere rumour of such wonders would naturally rouse their attention and quicken their hopes of a speedy deliverance from the Roman yoke.

But when they found that all the discourses of this extraordinary Person tended to destroy their glittering prospects, by directing the thoughts of men to

spiritual enjoyments, and enjoining for that purpose the mortification of carnal desires, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, the miracles which had excited so much notice were no longer remembered with veneration. When the doctrines of Jesus were found to be subversive of that popular delusion which was common to all classes of men in that state, neither the purity of his character, the disinterested generosity of his conduct, nor the supernatural deeds which he continually wrought for the relief of the afflicted, could lay a restraint upon the tongue of malice, or move the nation to a sense of gratitude. So long as they had any hopes that he would promote their wishes in the restoration of Israel to a state of independence, so long did the multitude follow him gladly, and extol his works; but the continued poverty in which he chose to dwell, his determined rejection of all schemes of grandeur, and the favour which he showed to those who were despised and hated by his countrymen, lowered him in the public esteem to such a degree, that even his miracles were at length disregarded, because his doctrine was offensive. Hence we find that the root of infidelity lies in the vicious propensities of the human heart; and till these are purged away by repentance, any absurdity will be respected or falsehood believed, rather than the truth, which requires the subjugation of the passions and an entire conformity to the will of God. The Pharisees, whose hypocrisy and craft equalled their pride and bigotry, preserved an artful silence with respect to the stupendous cures performed by our Lord, because the removal of obstinate diseases and the restoration of life could neither be denied nor accounted for by any natural causes; but when the same power was manifested in the relief of persons possessed by evil spirits, these cunning deceivers contrived to mislead the wondering multitude by saying, "He casteth out

devils through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." It is of little moment whether these men actually believed what they asserted, nor is the confidence placed in them by the people any excuse for their credulity. The conduct of the rulers proceeded from the most malevolent motives, and an inveterate hatred to the person of One whose doctrine tended to subvert their traditions and inventions; while they who suffered themselves to be so blinded were hardly less culpable than their deceivers, for resisting the evidence of their senses and the plain dictates of reason, in compliance with the arbitrary judgment of an interested party. Neither the one nor the other took any pains to search the Scriptures, for the purpose of ascertaining the real character of the Messiah, and of discovering whether the things which they heard and saw corresponded with what had been predicted of the kingdom of God. Instead of pursuing this rational course, when the Pharisees found that our Lord's doctrine overturned their errors, they resolved to destroy his credit with the people, who were the more easily disposed to slight this Divine Teacher, because the kingdom announced by him was totally different from that which they had painted in their own imaginations. What was thus exhibited in Judea is common to every age; for men who cannot endure that truth which is contrary to their notions and habits, will very readily embrace any falsehood, or attend to any subterfuge, to get rid of its influence. With all their boasted pretensions to freedom of sentiment, none are so much the slaves of prejudice as infidels, who either make their own self-will the rule of all things, or implicitly adopt such opinions as tend to flatter the pride of their understandings. While they affect to despise all articles of faith, and are indignant against Divine revelation, they are at the same time the most credulous of mortals, and will admit any delusion of

the imagination, provided it furnishes a plausible pretext for rejecting the light of the Gospel. "Take heed therefore, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Heb. iii. 12.

OCTOBER THE SECOND.

THE MISSION OF THE APOSTLES.

Matt. x. 1.—And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

NOTWITHSTANDING the infidelity which distinguished the Jewish rulers, and the body of the people who suffered themselves to be deceived by their misrepresentations, there were not wanting some who gladly heard the joyful sound of salvation, and believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah. But these holy souls, who in much sincerity waited for the consolation of Israel, were mixed in various directions with a multitude of sceptics and libertines; men who were indifferent to all religion, or particularly adverse to the Gospel on account of its opposition to their vices. Thus Judea, in the time of our Saviour, was an exact picture of the world, where the great mass of mankind, with all their pretensions to superior wisdom, and affected admiration of virtue, are under the influence of pride and prejudice; "loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." John, iii. 19. Still in the midst of this corruption there are a few chosen ones who look for redemption with anxious desire, and are willing to receive it in the simplicity of their hearts, to follow the Saviour

in the path of righteousness, and to enter into his kingdom upon the conditions of faith and repentance. But the number of these believers is comparatively small, and "like the shaking of the prophetic olive-tree, there will be found in the gathering season only two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough; four or five in the utmost fruitful branches thereof." Is. xvii. 6. Yet whether there are signs of an abundant increase or not, the care of the labourer must continue unrelaxed, and the prayers of the faithful be incessant in the behalf of the church, that her borders may be enlarged and her children multiplied. Our Lord hath said, that "many are called, but few are chosen;" and if this was the case in the day of his personal ministration, it will unavoidably be the same in every age, till the appointed time shall arrive when the Divine messengers will separate the tares from the wheat. The Gospel, however, in the mean time must be preached to all indiscriminately, and the effects of it left to the wisdom and goodness of the Lord of the vineyard, whose spirit will sanctify the work, though to appearance it is so ineffectual as to be, even in the judgment of those employed, little better than labour in vain. The great Head of the Church, who was acquainted with the secret devotions of Nathanael under the fig-tree, knew perfectly what would be the result of his own preaching and that of his disciples. As he had the power of distinguishing the humble and honest hearted from the bigots and the libertines of that generation, he might, if it had so pleased him, have addressed the offer of grace to those only who he knew would receive it with meekness and bring forth the fruits of holiness. But, like the sun, which shineth equally upon the just and the unjust, he went about continually doing good, and imparting the tidings of eternal life to all descriptions of persons; thus setting an example of indefatigable diligence and perfect

love to all his followers, while at the same time he gave an evident proof that his redemption is free for the acceptance of every one who will hear the word of truth with candour, and comply with its terms. There are two circumstances in the history of our Lord's ministry which call for particular attention, as they show the necessity of tempering zeal with prudence, and of conducting the Christian life, in all respects, according to the rules laid down in his word and recommended by his practice. Though he had the Spirit beyond measure, and was entrusted with no less an undertaking than that of enlightening and saving the world, he passed many years in obscurity, and in the exercise of a laborious occupation, before he came forth in the character of a public reformer. In like manner his disciples were kept a considerable time in constant attendance upon their Master's person, that they might profit by his teaching and be edified by his example, before they received a commission to perform miracles and to preach the Gospel of the kingdom : not only so, but even then, when the harvest was great and the labourers were few, he selected twelve only out of the body of his disciples to be his co-operators in the work of the ministry, and for the superintendence of the church ; thereby fixing a system of order which no private believer has any right to violate, whatever may be his abilities or however fervent may be his piety. To lead a quiet life in all godliness and honesty, is the limited duty of every Christian who has not been regularly called and appointed to the office of public instruction by the Divine Householder ; according to the precepts and forms which he has established for the government of his community. The church of God is a society fitly framed, and regularly constituted with settled laws and proper administrators, who are accountable for their management in that capacity to Him from whom they

derive their authority. The ministerial acts are not the less valid because the men who perform them are in other respects unworthy of confidence ; for in the small number originally set apart with extraordinary powers to confirm the message which they delivered, one of them had a devil. Our Lord knew from the beginning who would betray him, yet this did not hinder him from conferring the apostolical qualifications upon the traitor ; consequently the miracles which Judas wrought, and the doctrines which he preached, were not affected by the baseness of his disposition, " though he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." John, xii. 6. From this instance we learn that it is unlawful to create a schism in the church, by breaking the bond of Christian union, on account of the personal imperfections of our teachers, or with the specious pretence of seeking for greater edification under men of superior eloquence and holiness. In the appointment of the Apostles no distinction was at all made, either with regard to their talents or their virtues ; but as they were all alike invested with the gift of miracles, so a general blessing was promised to those who received either of them in his appropriate character, as the messenger of the Messiah. " Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Our Lord had just before told them that they should meet with a large share of that persecution which had been experienced so abundantly by himself ; and he laid an injunction upon them to avoid even the appearance of worldly-mindedness, that they might not give the enemy an advantage against them, nor offend believers by their irregularity. But then he comforted them by the promise, that in all their difficulties his Spirit would guide and support them, that the prize of their high calling was a crown of

righteousness, and that he "who endured to the end should be saved." Though the course which they had to pursue was most trying, perplexed with cares and filled with trouble, yet the end of it was to be marked with glory and happiness, the security of their own salvation if they persevered faithfully in their Master's cause, and the certainty of diffusing the knowledge of his redemption to all generations; as he said upon another occasion, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." John, xvi. 20.

OCTOBER THE THIRD.

THE WIDOW'S SON RESTORED.

Luke, vii. 13.—*And when the Lord saw her he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not:*

THE miracles of our Saviour were all calculated to serve the purposes of moral and religious instruction in every age, while they afforded indubitable proofs of his Divinity to those who beheld them. They were not mere dazzling instances of wonderful knowledge and prodigious power, exciting the astonishment of the generation in which they were wrought, and furnishing matter of curious speculation to succeeding times. But these supernatural acts were displayed for the removal of evil and the comfort of the afflicted, the correction of error and the promotion of righteousness. Wherever he came, the sight of distress moved his compassion, and he was ready to wipe away the tears of the mourner, even without solicitation or delay. He passed not the poor and helpless with an excuse of urgent business, and the promise of attending to their misery in a hour of

leisure; but he kindly stopped to hear their complaints, to pity their sad condition, to pour consolation into their bosoms, and even to offer them his mighty aid when they were themselves lost in grief and dead to hope. The Redeemer did not send forth messengers to announce his approach and to proclaim his gracious intentions, in the market-places and the synagogues, that a crowd of gazing spectators might be assembled to witness his marvellous deeds and amazing condescension. His love flowed spontaneously, and with no other aim than that of healing the broken-hearted, dispelling the gloom of sorrow, and sending home those rejoicing who came out in despair. A remarkable instance of this kind occurred soon after the appointment of the Apostles to their high office; for, as we learn from the preceding history, "it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities;" from which it is evident that our Lord accompanied the persons whom he had chosen as his assistants, at the beginning of their ministry, and thus became the inspector of their conduct and their director in difficulties.

On coming to Nain, which lay near to Mount Tabor, a melancholy spectacle presented itself to their view, and by which their entrance into the place was for some time retarded. It was a crowded procession, consisting of all the respectable inhabitants, attending the body of a man carried on an open bier for internment in the neighbouring cemetery. This was a proof that the deceased had borne a reputable character among his fellow-citizens; but there were some peculiar circumstances in this case, which accounted for the general sympathy, and for this last mark of esteem to the memory of a deserving object. The body now slowly removing to the receptacle of mortality was that of a young man, cut

off in the flower of his days, and, what was more affecting, in the exercise of filial duty, and most probably of public usefulness. To render the death of this pious youth more distressing in the circle of his friends, he was an only son; and that the climax of woe might reach the height of suffering, "his mother was a widow." Here the feeling mind turns from the clay-cold corpse and the departed spirit, from the chasm made in society and the honourable friendship of the people of Nain, to mix its sorrow with that of the chief mourner, who has been deprived of her last earthly comfort, and perhaps of her principal support in the evening of life. But whatever might be the worldly condition of this woman, neither the kind attentions of numerous acquaintance, nor the possession of wealth, could repair the breaches which had been made in her enjoyments and prospects. When her husband was taken away, she could turn with fond regard to the opening powers and pleasing endearments of her child, being relieved from the pressure of her late calamity by the anticipation of blessings to come. Time, no doubt, had mellowed down the sense of her former loss into a grateful remembrance, as all her expectations became realized in the mental improvement and affectionate behaviour of her only child. Heavy and dreadful then, beyond conception, must have been that stroke which deprived this mother in Israel of the single prop upon which she relied for temporal aid in the few and evil days of her painful pilgrimage. Instead of having her own eyes closed by the hand of filial tenderness, and being followed by a train of descendants to the tomb of her husband, this afflicted widow was compelled to witness the seal of death upon the countenance of her beloved offspring, and to measure her steps slowly after the bearers of his remains to the sepulchre of his fathers. Well then might this daughter of affliction weep as she moved.

onwards to the "house appointed for all living;" and they who could behold the mournful scene without dropping the tear of sympathy, must have been alike insensible to the feelings of humanity and the sentiments of religion. We are required to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep;" the junction of which precepts teaches us that it is not enough to commiserate with our afflicted brethren, but that we must also endeavour, as far as lies in our power, to turn their sorrow into joy. Thus when our blessed Redeemer met the funeral procession at the gates of Nain, and beheld the distress of the widow, he had compassion on her; but his pity was not manifested in expressions of kindness and exhortations to religious submission; nor did he talk to the poor woman about the inevitable lot of mortality, the brevity of life, and the duty of resignation to the will of Providence. Leaving such considerations to the calmer season of reflection, when the mind should be in a fit state to hear and apply the lesson of wisdom, Jesus drew near and said, "Weep not." His first concern was to suspend the ebullition of grief, by attracting the thoughts of the mourner to another object; and without waiting to give an explanation of his intentions, he touched the bier, which occasioned the bearers and attendants, who were struck with the gracious words and majestic appearance of the stranger, to stand still. The pause of expectation was solemn, but it was short; for that Word which gave light to the universe, was heard with equal effect in the region of death, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." This command was no sooner issued than it was obeyed; and the body, which just before lay pallid and lifeless, emaciated by sickness and disposed to putrescence, regained its wonted health and activity: "He that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus delivered him to his mother." The departed spirit not only re-

turned to its former tenement, but with such a complete reunion of functions as indicated an entire restoration of mental energy and corporeal vigour. So perfect was the miracle, that it resembled the rising of a person from his sleep, rather than the resurrection of one who had passed through the agonies of dissolution; for the young man awoke at the voice of the Saviour, sat up without any assistance, began to converse with his friends, and on stepping from the bier was presented to his astonished, overpowered, and rejoicing parent. In this touching scene we have a lively picture of the awakened soul, raised from the death of sin to newness of life; and instead of lying useless, or being consigned to utter darkness, called by grace to the proper exercise of its rational faculties, and enabled to walk before God in the way of righteousness. Here also we have a representation of that eventful period, for which we should live in daily preparation, when "all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John, v. 28, 29.

OCTOBER THE FOURTH.

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN.

Matt. xi. 6.—*Blessed is he, who shall not be offended in me.*

PERSECUTION is the lot of the righteous, because their principles and pursuits being different from the maxims and customs of the world, they become, in consequence, objects of jealousy and dislike to those who have neither the courage to shake off their own

errors, nor the sincerity to admire the virtues of others. Even voluntary poverty, and a life of seclusion, will be insufficient to secure the character of the pious from obloquy, and their persons from contempt; for where the wicked cannot contaminate they will injure, and those who endeavour to shun their society must expect to be treated as the enemies of the liberty of man, because they refuse to share in his licentiousness. The humility of the Baptist exposed him to the hatred of the Pharisees, and the rigid austerity of his manners brought upon him the charge of hypocrisy. But their malice could go no farther than calumny; for the people who witnessed the upright deportment of John, and knew the simplicity of his manners, regarded him as a prophet. Lust and revenge, however, contrived to effect what bigotry and superstition could not dare to attempt; and the holy man, for his integrity in rebuking Herod on account of his adulterous connexion with the wife of his brother, was thrown into prison. There the forerunner of the Messiah heard of the mighty works which were performed by Jesus of Nazareth; upon which he sent two of his disciples to the extraordinary Person, concerning whom such wonders were reported, with this message, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Considering the explicit testimony borne by John to the Divine origin of the Redeemer, it seems rather unaccountable that he should now have entertained any doubts upon the subject of our Lord's mission. This supposed inconsistency has driven some commentators to hypothesis for an explication of the difficulty, by representing the question of the Baptist as intended to settle the minds of his followers, and to bring them acquainted with Him who had the words of eternal life. But if the design of John had been no more than to clear up the doubts of his disciples, he would hardly have sent them with an inquiry which

strongly expressed his own inquietude and anxiety upon a matter of the highest importance; nor would our Lord, if he had so understood the message of his precursor, have concluded his reply with language, the only plain interpretation of which is that of gentle reproof for the weakness of faith. We are to view the Baptist as the chosen messenger of God, endued with all the knowledge and powers necessary for the service to which he was appointed; but these were limited, and combined with the common infirmities of human nature. In some respects this minister of righteousness was much inferior to the disciples of Christ; for we read not of any miracles performed by him, nor had he the gift of the Spirit in the measure which was imparted to them, as a necessary qualification for the preaching of the Gospel to men of all nations. More, then, could not be expected from the forerunner of our Lord than from his immediate attendants; and as it is certain that these persons, notwithstanding the advantages which they enjoyed and the powers which they possessed, continued almost to the end of their Master's life to cherish the hope that he would establish the independence of Israel, it is not surprising that John, in prison, should feel some concern at being neglected. We read of the ancient prophets, that they were occasionally so impatient under their own troubles as to blend their private feelings with the denunciations of the Divine judgments; it is therefore no just ground of wonder, that this faithful servant of the Most High should find it difficult to reconcile his dismal condition with the magnificent descriptions of the Messiah's kingdom. Though the minds of those who were called to declare the secret purposes of God could not err, with respect to the matters which they were commissioned to proclaim, yet in all other things they were subject to the common infirmities of

human nature. The great prophet whom the Baptist resembled, distinguished as he was by zeal and fortitude, when he stood opposed to a vindictive monarch, a numerous body of idolatrous priests, and an host of armed men, was yet terrified by the single menace of an irritated woman, to avoid whose malice he fled into the wilderness. There the word of the Lord came to the timid Elijah, and recalled him to his duty, by the information that there were seven thousand believers in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal; and thus, also, in answer to the question of the Baptist, the Saviour condescended to refer to his works, as the proper evidence of his Divine authority, concluding with this mild but expressive remonstrance, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." This answer, which the disciples were directed to deliver to their master, was a manifest censure of his conduct, in finding fault with One of whom he had witnessed such great things, and of whose miracles he had incontrovertible proofs. Yet John was offended because he was suffered to languish in prison, instead of being employed in a distinguished manner, as became the herald of the Lord, and appointed to usher in the kingdom of righteousness. That he had been informed of the commission granted to the Apostles, and the extraordinary powers with which it was accompanied, can hardly be doubted, since some of his early followers were among the number. This very circumstance, therefore, would naturally contribute to increase the uneasiness of John, and render him dissatisfied in his present condition. He probably thought it hard that one who had endured so much preparatory trouble, and who had borne the heat and burthen of the day, should meet with no mark of favour from the blessed Jesus, when persons of inferior character were so highly exalted. But the offence of John did not lie in his impatience and the

disquietude of his spirit under confinement ; for the weakness of our nature is such, that Divine goodness, while it permits affliction to continue for our good, pities rather than blames the sorrowful heart and the murmuring tongue. That the pious man should be uneasy in his dungeon, was excusable ; and that he should be desirous of being employed in the great work of salvation, was commendable ; but he was wrong in forming a gloomy opinion of Him who owed to no man an account of his ways. The Baptist did not rightly consider the nature of his own particular office, as a messenger and ambassador, which of course must cease when the principal appears ; nor had he any just notions of that redemption which our Lord came into the world to accomplish by his death and resurrection. This was as yet a profound mystery, of which even the bearers of the Gospel message were ignorant ; for it was not till a considerable time after this that " Jesus began to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Matt. xvi. 21. On hearing this, Peter took so much offence as to rebuke his Master, because he could not reconcile the dismal prospect here exhibited with his splendid ideas of the glory of the Messiah's kingdom. The error of John was of a similar nature ; and as it showed the want of a proper conformity of his will to the dispensation of grace, the Saviour, who did not think proper to give the reason why distress and persecution were necessary to prepare the establishment of his throne, contented himself with appealing to his works as the evidence of his authority ; and requiring of all believers an entire acquiescence in the wisdom of his designs and the rectitude of his actions, though by their attachment to him they were obliged to live in poverty and to die in prison. " What I do," saith

he to every murmuring disciple, "thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." John, xiii. 7.

OCTOBER THE FIFTH.

THE PENITENT WOMAN.

Luke, vii. 47.—*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*

IN the answer returned by our blessed Lord to the impatient inquiry of the Baptist, it was mentioned, among other evidences of his authority as the Son of God, that "the poor had the Gospel preached unto them." The persons here described as enjoying the high distinction of hearing the word of life immediately from the Saviour, were not mean and abject in outward circumstances, though even to such the offer of grace was freely imparted, but those who are elsewhere characterized by the Divine Teacher as "being poor in spirit." So far from having, like the Pharisees, proud notions of their moral worthiness, or forming vain expectations of temporal grandeur in the kingdom of the Messiah, these humble souls freely acknowledged their sinfulness, and came to Jesus for relief under the burthen of an afflicted conscience. It is not a little remarkable that the chief of these believers, who openly professed their reliance upon the merits and power of the Redeemer for the healing of their moral diseases, were of that sex whose general timidity of disposition and seclusion from popular assemblies, might seem to have excused a different line of conduct. Yet while the learned, who were conversant in the prophetic Scriptures, rejected Christ on account of his birth and poverty, and while the Apostles themselves

were looking eagerly for the establishment of an earthly monarchy; a few feeble women had more refined ideas of the kingdom of heaven, and came to the Saviour, not for wealth and splendour, but for the remission of their sins. An instance of this occurred in the house of Simon the Pharisee, who being desirous of hearing our Lord's doctrine and of observing his deportment, gave him an apparently courteous invitation to dinner. But that the motive of this man was rather to gratify his curiosity than to show his esteem for Jesus, is evident from his behaviour, which, however hospitable it might seem, was deficient in the ordinary forms of respect paid in that country to guests of distinction. The Teacher of Righteousness, however, did not reject the solicitation of those who courted his company, though he knew the pride of their hearts and the malignity of their intentions. It was his rule to "become all things to all men," in the proper sense of urbanity; and therefore he declined no opportunity of doing good, though the principles of the persons who sought his acquaintance were evil, and their inducements ostentatious. In this, also, he showed no less prudence than benevolence; for by refusing to accept the invitations of those who stood in high repute on account of their supposed wisdom and sanctity, some colour would have been afforded to that invidious charge, "Behold, he is the friend (or associate) of publicans and sinners." But by cheerfully complying with the overtures of the rigid ceremonialists, he gave them ample room to judge of his conversation, and either to profit by his discourses, or to report what they had heard to those in authority. Thus our blessed Saviour neither shrunk from inquiry nor assumed a severe austerity of manners, calculated to provoke the resentment of men in power. He was always willing to receive the petitions of the wretched, whatever might be their character and condition, and

he was also ever ready to meet the advances of those who expressed a wish to enjoy his company for the sake of his instructions. While he was at the table of this opulent Pharisee, a woman of the city, well known for the irregularity of her past life, entered the room, and stood behind the couch on which Jesus lay reclined, in the posture used by the people of the East at their meals. We have no account of any miracle having been wrought for this person; and yet such was her gratitude for some great blessing which she had experienced, that she provided a vase of precious perfume, with full purpose to pour it upon the head of her Benefactor. But as she stood leaning in fixed attention to his gracious words, the remembrance of her former state, and the prospect of mercy which his Gospel opened to her view, gave such force to the conflicting passions of sorrow and joy, that her soul was overpowered, and her tears flowed down copiously upon his naked feet, which she wiped with the hair of her head. As if she had been fearful of having given offence to one whom she intended to honour, this true penitent took the unctuous mixture, which she had so carefully prepared, and applied it to his feet, which were perhaps pained by her scalding tears and swollen with the fatigue of going about to do good. The action of the woman was minutely watched by the master of the house; but instead of exciting his admiration at the change which had taken place in the conduct of a person notorious for her levity, or raising his opinion of the wondrous Teacher, whose preaching had wrought so great a reformation, the man beheld the scene with mingled feelings of resentment and contempt. That an open sinner should presume to pollute his dwelling with her presence, was intolerable; but it was still more unaccountable, that one who had the reputation of being the Messenger of God should allow so vile a creature to take these liberties with his person. All

this passed in the mind of Simon, who having weighed the case according to the arbitrary decisions of his narrow sect, which allowed no place for repentance to such persons, he very sagaciously concluded, that whatever might be the powers or the talents of Jesus, he certainly could be no prophet, otherwise he would have known that this woman was a sinner. Though our Lord accurately marked the revolving thoughts of the Pharisee, he did not directly tax him with the want of justice and charity, but had recourse to his usual mode of conveying instruction by a parable of two debtors who owed different sums to the same creditor, yet received from him an equal discharge. Simon, on being asked which of these two would feel the warmest love for so generous a benefactor, readily allowed that he who had received the greatest favour was the most likely to express the strongest sense of gratitude. In making this acknowledgement he was not aware that he condemned his own want of liberality, and gave a powerful testimony in behalf of the poor creature who was the object of his censure. But Jesus completed the application by stating explicitly the treatment which he had met with from this formal professor of religion, compared with that of one whose course of life seemed to show that she had lost all sense of virtue. The word of salvation, which the proud and lordly Pharisees rejected, because in their judgment they needed it not, was heard with gladness by the poor and the destitute, who, conscious of their spiritual wants and defiled nature, were filled with joy at the offer of a free pardon; and knowing that they had no righteousness of their own, accepted with thankful hearts the mercy of the Redeemer. This woman is a picture of every believing soul, when awakend from the lethargy and voluptuousness of sin to a consciousness of its pollution and danger; from the folly of sensual pleasure to the

apprehension of a judgment to come. No dread of the world's reproaches can prevent such from following the Saviour; and all who feel the burthen of guilt upon their minds, and who are sensible that from him alone they can hope for deliverance, will, like this humble convert, show the depth of their contrition and the sincerity of their repentance. Thus they will receive the inexpressible joy which resulteth from that peace which passeth all understanding, because it is sealed by the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins through the merits of Him, whose grace working effectually in their hearts, makes them continually labouring, while they are in this vale of tears and imperfection, to "purify themselves even as he is pure." 1 John, iii. 3.

OCTOBER THE SIXTH.

THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

John, v. 4.—*An angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.*

It is to be lamented that errors in religion should have multiplied through the indiscreet zeal of those who have attempted to explain the difficulties of Scripture on ordinary principles, and to account for miraculous events by means which, though not perhaps of common occurrence, are yet within the compass of human probability. Thus the most mysterious truths concerning the Divine essence and operations, which are infinitely above the comprehension of the human intellect, have been presumptuously represented as nothing more than idiomatical expressions, and me-

taphorical descriptions ; setting forth, in a peculiar style of elevated composition, the goodness of God towards mankind, and the dignity of Christ as the messenger of his will. But if such interpretations be admitted, the authority of revelation will be lessened, since the language in which it is conveyed cannot be relied upon, and the unlettered reader will be led to inquire why that which is a universal rule should in any instance have been so raised above the subject, by artificial elegance, as to mislead the understanding which it was intended to inform ? It is derogatory to the Divine wisdom to suppose that there was any necessity for accommodating truths, which concern all men alike, to the capacities of particular persons ; for except the bare relation of facts, which required of course an exact attention to local usages, there was nothing in the history of redemption but what might be properly stated in terms level to the understanding of every man, in every age and clime. The circumstances which excite our notice and inquiry, were equally marvellous and unaccountable to those who witnessed them ; but as the most intelligent observers of that day had not the effrontery to call in question what was seen by thousands as well as themselves, so they did not venture to assign any natural causes for the marvellous incidents which they beheld. In this respect modern criticism has gone far beyond the infidelity of the Sadducees and the malignity of the Pharisees ; for it seems, that had the properties of nature been as well known in those times as they are at present, many things, which in the Scriptures are ascribed exclusively to the Divine agency, would have been found nothing more than the powerful effects produced by the action of material substances upon each other, and proving of salutative virtue in particular diseases. We have a remarkable instance of this convenient mode of illustrating the Sacred History,

in the scientific explications that have been given of the miraculous cures wrought, only at a certain season and in a very singular way, at the pool or bath of Bethesda. Though this had long been a place of public resort for ablution and recreation, yet it does not appear that the water was famous for its medicinal powers till the time of our Lord's coming; and even then, the people who came to receive its benefit were sensible that the blessing was miraculous and limited. Had they merely imagined that at the return of a certain period some extraordinary qualities were imparted to the water, they would not have taken up the strange idea, that these qualities could be efficacious only to one patient at a time. To whatever extravagant length superstition might have carried the efficacy of a first immersion, the afflicted, who were groaning with pain and came from a distance, would hardly have returned home without trying whether some relief might not be obtained, though a perfect cure was not to be expected. If, as some think, the water derived its virtue from the blood of the sacrifices offered at the great yearly feast, or, as others more philosophically account for it, from the operation of mineral particles stirred up and set in motion by the rains, in either case it is impossible to explain why one person alone should be healed by the agitation, or how so vast an assembly of patients could entertain such a belief, when all of them were anxious to get rid of their maladies. But the evangelical historian gives a sufficient reason for both, to those who will submit reason to faith, by expressly affirming, that during the particular season of which he is speaking, an angel came down at stated intervals and troubled the water; the consequence of which was, that the person who first entered the bath was immediately freed from his complaint. The sacred writer says, that there was no other virtue in the water than what it derived from

the action of the angel; and this is described as a personal, though not visible descent, with circumstances which plainly indicated the operation of the celestial visitant upon the element. In what way the miraculous virtue given to this particular water was discovered, is beside our purpose to consider; but the infirm people were well acquainted with the times when it happened, and the sign by which to know that it was effected. This singular display of the Divine mercy was made to the Jewish nation at one particular season, for the purpose of directing the general attention to the great salvation then about to be accomplished; and had they not been sunk in a state of sensual indulgence and lethargic formality, they would have discerned both the sign and its object in the prophetic Scriptures; for thus, among others, it was foretold by Zechariah, "In that day," corresponding with the "certain season" of the Evangelist, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Ch. xiii. 1. The day here mentioned was that of the Messiah, which had all the characteristics stated in the predictive picture, not only in a spiritual but even in a literal sense; and thus when the Saviour came to renew human nature, and to bring in everlasting righteousness by the shedding of his blood once for all, a sign was given of it, in the miraculous virtue imparted for a season to the water of Bethesda. While the sick and their friends crowded the porticoes that surrounded the bath, Jesus himself came by, and observing one miserable object, who had been thirty-eight years a cripple, he compassionately said, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The question was apparently needless, for the wish of this poor man was easily to be inferred from his situation; but our blessed Lord intended in this, as in other instances, to show that his grace, to be effectual, must be received by a willing and

humble mind. It is plain that this enfeebled creature was far advanced in life, and it is equally clear that his condition was very wretched, since he had not one friend to help him down into the bath. Yet we do not find that he was envious of those who were more fortunate than himself, or that he felt any resentment at the uncharitable neglect of his countrymen. But though he was utterly helpless, and could have little or no prospect of success where he had so many powerful competitors, still he would not depart from the place which afforded a chance of recovery. This remarkable instance of perseverance is an encouragement of the afflicted under the darkest visitations of Providence; teaching them to wait upon the Lord in his own ordinances, and according to the course which he has appointed, with patience and diligence; for in the language of prophecy, "the promise, or vision, is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come: it will not tarry." Hab. ii. 3. When the emaciated and destitute cripple had finished his simple story, that Being who gave a momentary benefit to the waters, commanded him "to rise, take up his couch and walk." The man did as he was directed; for the muscles which had been rigid so many years, instantaneously regained their elasticity, the limbs became active, and all the bodily functions assumed their usual courses. But it was the Sabbath-day; and that which ought to have drawn from all who witnessed this stupendous change songs of praise to the Lord of the Sabbath, served only to increase the infidelity of the Jewish rulers, who censured the man for carrying his bed, and sought to put Jesus to death for violating their construction of the law. This disregard of miracles may by some be considered as a proof that the design of them was frustrated; but in reality these striking wonders had a more ex-

tensive object than that of yielding benefit to particular persons, or of converting the generation among whom they were wrought. It was expressly foretold that the signs of the Messiah's coming would be neglected by those who saw them, but that the rejection of his Gospel should be the means of spreading the knowledge of his salvation among all nations; for thus saith the prophet, after describing this miraculous sign of the death of Christ and the dissolution of the Jewish state, "It shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter it shall be. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one." Zech. xiv. 8, 9,

OCTOBER THE SEVENTH.

THE SABBATH SANCTIFIED.

Mark, iii 4.—*Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?*

ALL hypocrisy is intolerant, because they who place religion in mere words and forms, which may be learnt and practised without improving the heart or regulating the conduct, will naturally condemn those who prefer "judgment, mercy, and faith," to distinctions, which at the most have no more than a significant value as the representatives of higher blessings. Among the institutions which the Divine wisdom ordained from the beginning for the comfort and edification of man, that of appropriating one day in seven as a season of rest and devotion, was a striking instance of benevolence; for while it elevated the

mind to a superior state of intellectual enjoyment, the precept taught that the only acceptable way of serving the Almighty is in the exercise of love and charity to his creatures. Yet, such^e is the folly of human nature, when it attempts to refine what God hath appointed, the Pharisees, instead of regarding the ordinance as a law of liberty, made it a yoke of bondage by the superinduction of frivolous rules and arbitrary exactions. But like all the rest of their explications and additions to the written word, the rigorous construction of the commandment respecting the sabbath, did not proceed from any real design to promote morality or to extend the benefits of revelation; for these proud zealots looked upon the body of the people with contempt, and were more anxious for the reputation of their own traditions than for the authority of the Scriptures. It is true, they had the appearance of godliness, but it was nothing more than parade to gain admiration; for, as our Lord observed, "They did all their works to be seen of men;" therefore we find this Divine Teacher taking every opportunity to oppose their principles and to condemn their practices. Though he was ever ready to assist those who supplicated his favour, yet on the seventh day he seems to have laboured with greater assiduity than at other times, and to have sought out objects of distress with peculiar diligence, that he might bestow his healing virtue upon them. This custom of his was so well known to the stern expositors of the Mosaic institute, that they watched him at that season with great attention; and while they made a scruple of performing those deeds of mercy which are most agreeable to God, they felt not the slightest compunction in doing those of the devil. Hence they who would not stir out of the way to save a fellow-creature from perishing, could readily obtrude themselves into the company of Jesus as he walked in the fields, where the harmless

action of his disciples in plucking the ears of corn to gratify a craving appetite, gave such offence to these grave professors; that they turned it into a matter of accusation against the Saviour, as if he encouraged his followers in doing what was unlawful. Our Lord, in reply, justified the act, by referring to the history of David, who in his necessities obtained the bread of the presence from the tabernacle, and concluding with this important remark, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Of this admirable maxim, which applies to all the forms of religion, by stating their original and defining their objects, the Divine Author gave an illustrious exemplification, either on the same sabbath or the next, by showing, even in the synagogue, that the proper work of that day was mercy rather than sacrifice. The holiness of times and places is relative and subordinate to moral duty, the neglect of which is not to be palliated by the plea of conformity to positive institutions. Our blessed Lord was distinguished by his punctual regard to both; for as he never omitted any opportunity of showing his good will to man, so he revered all the ordinances of God, and never failed in his attendance upon the public services of religion. To unaffected humility and perfect piety, were added inflexible firmness and an ardent zeal, that scorned to temporize with folly or to flatter prejudice. When he saw a man in the synagogue, with a withered and contracted hand, though he knew that the Pharisees were then narrowly observing his looks, to discover whether he would presume to work a miracle in that place on the sabbath-day; yet he was neither to be deterred from doing what was right by their authority, nor would he delay the performance till another day, out of fear of their vengeance. Some persons might have thought that the lapse of a few hours was of little consequence in a matter which was far from being

urgent, and that prudence would have been well consulted by a little compliance with a leading party, who were decorous in their manners though narrow in their sentiments. But the sense of duty was superior to all other considerations in the mind of Him who came to do the will of God, and to set a perfect example to all believers. In the present case there were two things that required the immediate attention of one whose business was to reform abuse and to aid the afflicted; to destroy superstition, and restore human nature to its spiritual freedom. As, therefore, the Pharisees by their corruptions had debased religion, it was proper to expose their error, and that publicly, on the very day which was so grossly perverted by them, from its primitive design of joy and gratitude, to the observation of burthensome usages and rigid restrictions. The decrepit object, whose hand was become useless by muscular contraction, presented an apt emblem of the state to which man was reduced by the fall, and his utter inability to fulfill the law of righteousness till his will should be renewed and his faculties be invigorated. No attachment to the community of Israel, or respect for the Mosaic economy, could be suffered to impede the execution of that glorious design which the Lord of the sabbath came into the world to accomplish, for the redemption of mankind. Though he was sensible that his adversaries were watching to turn his miracles into a charge against him; yet fearless of the danger, he called upon the cripple to stand up in the midst of the assembly; and after remonstrating with the arrogant doctors on their inconsistency, he restored the decayed member to perfect activity, leaving the bigotted observers to brood over their malice and to plot his destruction. From this history we learn that the forms of religion are of no value where the spirit is wanting; and that when the commandment of God is peremptory, no

regard to expediency or plea of worldly prudence will be admitted as an excuse for disobedience or an apology for procrastination. Our Saviour might have healed this man in his own house, or on any other day of the week; but he rather chose to display his power in the synagogue, and on the sabbath-day, to show that the law of charity is of eternal obligation, and paramount to all ordinances and institutions. When an opportunity to do good occurs, it must be embraced without hesitation, lest the season should pass away, and leave nothing behind it but the painful reflection of having neglected our duty, while the power of performance depended upon the resolution. Let us then endeavour to imitate the Redeemer, whose whole life was devoted to the benefit of mankind, and who made this the constant rule of his conduct, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." John, ix. 4.

OCTOBER THE EIGHTH.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.

Matt. xii. 32.—*Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.*

IT may appear strange that so benevolent a system as that of the Gospel, which holds out the promise of universal redemption, and calls upon all sinners to accept the offer of mercy, should declare any offence unpardonable. Yet we find our Lord pronouncing the decree that there is such a sin, and affirming that it is without a remedy in this world, or hope in the next. In whatever sense this last assertion is to be understood, whether of two dispensations under the

Messiah, before the resignation of his mediatorial kingdom, or of the present and future life of man ; thus much is obvious from the sentence, that it contains the excision of some objects from His grace, who hath said, " He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." John, vi. 37. The importance of the subject, therefore, has turned the attention of many to the particular discussion of this transgression ; but it is to be feared, that while the harsh decisions of some have had the effect of lacerating tender consciences, by filling them with unreasonable fears the limited constructions of others have tended to weaken the influence which this warning was designed to have upon the minds of men in every age, as well as that when the judgment was delivered. In opposition, then, to those who have ventured to class sins of infirmity under the denomination of irredeemable offences, and those who suppose that the guilt was peculiar to the day of our Lord's ministry, it will be proper to examine the declaration, so that the serious mind may be kept from despondency, and the thoughtless from presumption. Though the declaration is general, and extends to all times, yet the exact meaning can only be discovered by an attentive regard to the context, and the occasion on which the words were uttered. Accordingly we find that the Pharisees, who were the inveterate enemies of Jesus, and determined at all hazards to prevent his being acknowledged by the nation as the Messiah, became greatly alarmed at the agitation produced in the public mind by his miraculous cure of the deaf and dumb demoniac. So astonished were the people at his command over the powers of nature and the spirits of darkness, that they began to reason upon these wonders, and to investigate the character and origin of the Person who performed them, saying to each other, " Is not this the son of David ?" Had the multitude been

left to their own observations, and suffered to pursue the train of thought which common sense pointed out to them; it is not improbable but that their prejudices against Christ, on account of his obscurity, would have been converted into an admiration of his virtues and a belief of his authority. The Pharisees were aware of this, and therefore they resolved to hinder the progress of inquiry by an infamous calumny, which though they did not credit themselves, yet they knew that it was well calculated to impose upon minds not habituated to the study of truth, or strong enough to shake off superstition. With unblushing effrontery, these hypocrites, when they could not deny the miracles which Jesus wrought, attributed them to an infernal compact; and though they had too much of the serpent's cunning to believe what they had invented, yet with worse, if possible, than the serpent's malice, they endeavoured to prevent that salvation from which they were themselves not excluded, till their own inflexible obduracy became the seal of condemnation. Their fraud, like that of the first seducer, prevailed; and the infatuated nation, with the exception of a small and comparatively insignificant number, rejected Him who came possessed of the Holy Ghost without measure, and displaying the mighty works of God beyond all example. Now whatever excuse may be allowed for the ostentatious vanity and lazy indifference of the community at large, none can be found to palliate the injustice of their rulers, and the wickedness of their teachers. These men knew that the Scriptures had described the Messiah as clothed with the very powers which shone forth in the actions of Jesus; they were also sensible that his coming was expected at this time, and that many signs and wonders had in fact announced his approach. Yet when they actually saw and conversed with him, when they beheld his miracles and heard his doctrine, neither

the proofs which he gave of his having come from God, the humility of his disposition, nor the regularity of his conduct, could subdue the black malignity of the Pharisees, or induce the Jewish community to lay aside their pride and uncharitableness. Nay, what was worse, the zealots, who held an almost unlimited sway over the mass of the people, went so far as to conspire with a political faction against the life of this holy Person, whose only offence was that of doing good and preaching righteousness. It cannot be denied that this summary of crimes was most hideous, yet it falls short of the enormities committed by men who arrayed themselves in the garb of sanctity, and affected to carry the observance of the law to perfection. But, according to the merciful declaration of our Lord, not all the sins of the Pharisees, though terminating in his murder, would have shut them out of the covenant of grace if they had avoided one transgression, to which even the benefit of his atonement could not be applied. Many of this very sect believed in Jesus, and some of them became brilliant ornaments of his church; in the course of his ministry he held familiar conversation with the principal men among them, and such was his tenderness, that his expiring breath was spent in prayer for his persecutors. It is evident, then, that neither the nation at large, nor the whole of this corrupt party, were guilty of that particular sin which the highest authority has declared to be past all forgiveness; because our blessed Lord interceded for the one, and selected some eminent disciples from the other. This affords ample ground of comfort to all whose consciences write bitter things against them; for whatever may have been their iniquities, the whole shall be cancelled by the application of the Redeemer's merits to the believing penitent. Still there is a sin unto death, of which they were guilty, who, in defiance of every

evidence, attributed the works of Jesus to an impure source, for the sole purpose of keeping the people in darkness. The Holy Ghost is called the Spirit of Truth; and as our Lord was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil and enlighten the world by his doctrine, he was inspired like the prophets, though in a higher degree, and endowed with more extraordinary powers. In charging him, therefore, with fraud, the Jewish teachers were guilty of lying against the Holy Ghost; and the ascription of his miracles to an infernal compact was blasphemy of the most atrocious kind, because it was not done under the influence of temptation, but with the design of extinguishing that light which was revealed for the salvation of men. Such was the offence of these Pharisees, who counteracted the preaching of the Redeemer; such was the sin of Judas, who betrayed his Master; and such was the sin of Caiaphas, who adjudged the Messiah to be worthy of death; for all these unhappy persons acted against the force of truth, and the conviction that no man could do the works which Jesus did, unless God were with him. Thus we see that the unpardonable guilt is not the mere resistance of the Spirit or the obstinate madness of scepticism, but the union of these evils in a mind wilfully determined to act against all its convictions, and resolved, as the calumniators of Jesus did, "neither to enter the kingdom of heaven, nor suffer others to enter in." Matt. xxiii. 13. It is however to be hoped that such instances of depravity are but rarely found, even in the midst of those corruptions which strongly denote that age of declining faith described by our Lord; when, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matt. xxiv. 12. But as laxity of principle tends to destroy the reverence which man owes to his Maker, every deviation from moral and religious truth must be an approximation

to that state of desperate infidelity where the mind hovers incessantly in doubt, and endeavours to find some relief by persuading others, that "evil is good, and good evil; putting darkness for light, and light for darkness." Is. v. 20. Let us then be careful to hold fast our faith without wavering; and whatever be our errors or deficiencies, the weakness of our hearts or the imperfection of our lives, we shall find this to guide us in the hour of reflection, and to support us in the season of trouble, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John, i. 7.

OCTOBER THE NINTH.

THE DANGER OF APOSTACY.

Matt. xii. 45.—*The last state of that man is worse than the first.*

THOUGH the design of the Son of God in coming into the world was to destroy the works of the devil, by bringing in a state of righteousness, which would ultimately triumph over the powers of darkness; yet it was never intended to accomplish the gracious decree at once, or to remove the corruptions of ages, as it were in a moment. It was indeed foretold, on the introduction of evil into the world, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; but this sentence neither implied the annihilation of the enemy, nor the extinction of his formidable qualities. All that the promise assured was the subjugation of the seducer, yet leaving him in the possession of his malignant disposition and mischievous properties. As the economy of redemption is purely moral, it must be probationary, which it could not possibly be, unless the mind has a freedom

of choice and the knowledge of a law, to render its conduct a proper subject of judicial investigation. But as man cannot be an accountable being without the means of doing wrong; it is evident that his integrity must be submitted to some kind of trial, to produce even that satisfaction which is the reward of having overcome the solicitation to evil. Now such temptations could not arise within himself, for in that case his compliance with them would have been no more than a constitutional infirmity; much less ought they to be ascribed to his Maker, for that would be representing the Almighty as the author of sin. Considering the number and magnitude of moral disorders which continually prevail in the world, we may well suppose that there are beings of an unknown nature, whose chief employ is to mislead the human understanding, and to pervert the will, for the purpose of rendering the deluded creatures wicked here and miserable hereafter. There is nothing more in this than what may be found within the sphere of our own observation, where we see superiority of intellect frequently united to powers which are constantly exercised in deceiving or oppressing mankind. Now it certainly cannot be unreasonable or uncharitable to believe, that if these persons had a wider range and more extensive information, their inclination to do mischief would become more venomous in proportion to their knowledge and capacity. Take a dark spirit of this cast from its organized tenement, expand its faculties, arm it with new and dreadful powers to gratify its lust and cruelty, enable it to penetrate the recesses of nature to multiply the engines of destruction, and give it, besides, a free and commanding access to the human sensory, where it may inflame the passions, and thus send forth man to ravage God's works in wantonness, and to shed the blood of the innocent without remorse. Pursuing the same train of thought, the

mind will soon figure to itself an indescribable scene of horror from the combination of a multitude of such intelligences expatiating through the universe, and limited only by their fears of the Deity. What thus may be imagined of the workers of iniquity, if their powers were as gigantic as their will is desperate, has a tremendous reality in the activity and malevolence of those spirits, who kept not their first estate, or that principality in which they were created, as an office of trust and dignity. It is said, indeed, that they are reserved in chains of darkness untill the great day; but that rather denotes their limited and despairing condition, than any local confinement; and it is certain, that however great may have been their degradation and misery, the perdition that awaits them at a future season is still more fearful. In the mean time they are instrumental in proving the children of men; for being lost to all sense of goodness, and utterly deprived of hope, they have no other pleasure than what consists in drawing men aside from the ways of virtue, and bringing them into the same state of condemnation with themselves. At the time of our Lord's personal ministry upon earth, they had an unusual degree of influence, and were permitted, no doubt for wise reasons, to exercise their tyranny over many distressed objects in a sensible manner, that the necessity of redemption might be more apparent, and the subjugation of the rebel leader more complete. Yet so perverse were the unbelieving Jews, that they attributed the expulsion of demons to magical skill, and the Pharisees, affecting to slight this command over the evil spirits, required Jesus to give them a sign from heaven. But this he judiciously refused to grant, because all his miracles were calculated for the benefit of mankind, and not to gratify an idle curiosity, or to comply with the petulant humour of infidels. Such wonders as these hypocrites sought, it would

have been beneath His character to have exhibited, whose works were distinguished rather by their utility than their splendour, and carrying in their effects, as well as in the manner of performance, the evidences of divinity to every sincere inquirer. But though our Saviour treated the proposition of the Pharisees as it deserved, he assured the Jewish nation, that they should have one awful and convincing sign of his power, which would be the prelude to their dereliction. The miraculous preservation of Jonah in the bosom of the deep, and his deliverance from the jaws of destruction, afforded an expressive type of the death and resurrection of the Son of Man. With this sign the season of grace was to close upon that sinful and adulterous generation, whose abuse of the Divine mercies was aggravated by the superior light which they possessed, and the wonders that had been wrought in their presence. The character and future condition of this people were then represented under the parabolical form of a person freed for a time from the dominion of an unclean spirit; but for want of faith and humility, care and diligence, falling again into the snares of the devil, and becoming by infidelity and licentiousness worse than at first. This description of an apostate nation, which was literally verified in their subsequent history, exactly corresponds with the state of every man whose mind has been enlightened with the knowledge of the truth, and whose conduct has exhibited for a while the show of reformation; but by yielding to indolence or pleasure, he suffers the enemy of righteousness to gain the mastery of his passions, and thus he is brought to practise, at last, all manner of iniquity with greediness. Now as the primary causes of apostacy are negligence, and an overweening confidence in ourselves, an indifference to the means of grace, and light notions of the adversary's power, it behoves us to labour diligently in

every good work, to watch over our hearts with fixed attention and humility, to be instant in season and out of season in the great business of eternal life, and, above all, to pray continually for the aid of the Holy Spirit, "lest we enter into temptation."

OCTOBER THE TENTH.

THE PARABOLICAL SERMON.

Matt. xiii. 3.—*He spake many things unto them in parables.*

THE mode of teaching adopted by our Saviour was so remarkable, that even his disciples could not help expressing their surprize at the circumstance of his addressing the multitudes in similitudes, rather than in the plain language of reproof and exhortation. The common reasons assigned for this practice are these, that it was the ordinary style of conveying instruction among the eastern moralists, and that it was particularly chosen by our Lord, to avoid giving unnecessary offence to the Jewish people and their leaders. Specious, however, as all this may seem, the account and supposition are liable to some serious objections; for the parables of Jesus are not only different from the apologues of the ancient fabulists, but they have even a cast of originality, that bears little resemblance to the allegories of the Old Testament. In the comparisons which this Divine Teacher drew between the operations of nature and the dispensations of grace, the ways of the world and the course of Providence, there is nothing obviously fictitious, no intelligence attributed to inanimate bodies, nor the powers of reasoning and conversation ascribed to beings incapable of reflection. That the delineation of religious and philosophical truths under figurative

forms, and in dramatic action, was of very early date and in general request, cannot be denied; but the evangelical illustrations have little of the fabulous character, and so far were they from being constructed in accommodation to the prejudices of any set of men, that the Pharisees were in fact more exasperated by the parables of Jesus than by his direct reproaches. This arose from the correct opinion which these acute, but perverse, bigots had of the narratives and allusions which our Lord beautifully introduced into most of his discourses. These learned professors were too well acquainted with the tropical language of prophecy not to perceive, that the similes which they heard were intended to represent the state of the Jewish church, and to point out a radical change in its polity and circumstances. Though the Pharisees could not comprehend the meaning of the parabolical descriptions, they saw enough to convince them that the whole were of a predictive character; but at the same time, while distant events were foretold, existing evils were indicated as the proximate causes of the mighty revolution that was about to take place. Still it may be made a matter of wonder, that a teacher so wise and benevolent as Jesus, who came to preach the Gospel to the poor, should speak to them in metaphorical language, and clothe his doctrines in an enigmatic dress. There was an apparent inconsistency in this, which perplexed even his disciples, till they were informed that the parables had a double object, being designed to impart moral instruction to the people, and to treasure up Divine knowledge for the use of the church. These relations and allusions were well calculated to excite a spirit of inquiry among all orders of persons at that time, and to lead the mind into a serious train of self-examination. Most of them taught some plain and practical truths, for the improvement of the heart

and the regulation of the conduct, besides covering a mystic and prophetic sense ; so that even they who could not understand the spiritual interpretation and remote object of the parable, were enabled by it to search their own hearts, to correct their errors, and to follow holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. The description of the husbandman going forth in the spring to sow his seed, is of this kind ; for while it displays the equity of the Divine administration in dispensing the word of life, it shows also the necessity of care and cultivation on the part of those to whom that revelation comes ; proving, by a very apposite analogy, that the gifts of grace, no more than those of nature, will be of any avail unless they are cherished in a humble and honest heart. Thus much the most simple understanding might have learned from this parable of the sower, at the time when it was delivered ; but our Lord in his exposition went farther, and showed that this imagery prefigured the characters of all to whom the Gospel should come, by means of his servants. The disciples were warned against trusting to appearances, or judging of men by their professions, but exhorted to labour with diligence, and to wait for the effects of their ministry with patience. To the same purpose the parable of the tares mixed with the wheat was intended to vindicate the ways of God in the moral creation, and to point the faith of man to a season of just and equal retribution ; while the messengers of Christ were taught by it to unite charity with zeal in the government of the church, and to leave the punishment of error to Him who judgeth righteously. As these discourses recommended faith and diligence to all men, and particularly to the persons who were selected by the great Householder for the purpose of planting his vineyard ; so the parable of the tree springing up from a small and insignificant seed, expressed in the most lively man-

ner the certainty of God's promises and the stability of his church. With the same view, the steady operation of Divine wisdom, in preparing and disposing the proper means for the accomplishment of the prophecies, was set forth in the strong but homely emblem of leaven, fermenting the mass of discordant materials, and bringing utility and beauty out of apparent evil and confusion. But while these parabolical descriptions give us an assurance, that the work of grace is going on exactly according to the original plan framed in the Eternal Mind, by the means best adapted to the improvement of those who are the objects of it; we are by the same authority warned of our duty, and informed that in this life only can we secure an interest in that great salvation. Our Lord illustrated this by the parallel instances of a man selling all his possessions to gain a field containing hidden treasure, and a merchant disposing of all his property to make the purchase of a jewel of inestimable worth. By these comparisons we are taught the necessity of sacrificing every pursuit and dependence that may be inconsistent with the redemption wrought out for us by the death and resurrection of Christ, the merits of which constitute the pearl of great price, or the only source of permanent satisfaction in this life, and of pure felicity in the next. This course of symbolical instruction was closed by a particular address to the disciples in a figurative scene drawn from their wonted occupation, and encouraging them to perseverance in the calling to which they were now appointed, though the church about to be gathered by their ministry should be made up of a mixture of sincere believers and unprofitable professors; the pure in heart, despised by men, and the ostentatious hypocrites who at the last day would be rejected by God. We see, then, that these emblematic representations were prophetic descriptions of what should occur in the

formation of the kingdom of heaven, or the establishment of the church of Christ upon earth; the characters of its members, the manner of its progress, and the glory of its consummation. But though all who heard these discourses could not perceive the enlarged scope of them, they might have learnt from each the need of a better righteousness than that which was afforded by the law, or which could be discovered by the exertions of reason. Our Lord gave them these instructions to rouse their minds, and to exercise the faculties which God had bestowed upon them, in the search after truth; but what he required of them, he still continues to enforce upon all to whom his Gospel is made known; "Take heed therefore how ye hear." Luke, viii. 18.

OCTOBER THE ELEVENTH.

THE DEATH OF JOHN.

Matt. xiv. 1, 2.—At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.

SUCH is the commanding force of conscience, that neither the splendour of rank nor the accumulation of riches, the attractions of pleasure nor the dogmas of philosophy, can ward off its terrors or elude its accusations. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the history of Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who was a tributary prince indeed, but of high authority in his own dominions, possessing an absolute controul over his subjects, and armed with military power to repel the aggressions of neighbouring states. If his ambition was bounded, he had at least the satisfac-

tion of knowing that all his contemporaries were in a similar condition ; and though he held his sovereignty at the will of the Roman government, yet he enjoyed every thing that could minister to luxury, no law being imposed upon him to mortify his pride or to restrain his passions. Herod was besides of that Epicurean sect, which, by denying the existence of immaterial beings and a future resurrection, placed all actions on the same footing, and thus endeavoured to release man from all fear of a judgment to come. But neither the sensual indulgences, nor the Sadducean principles of Herod, could hinder reflection from intruding unpleasant images to disturb his rest, and to fill his mind with dismal apprehensions. The fame of Jesus excited the astonishment of this prince ; but though he had every inducement, connected with his libertine course of life and the sceptical system which he professed, to call in question the truth of what was reported, yet he knew that these miracles were too well attested to be treated as deceptions, and of too complicated and stupendous a nature to be the effects of enthusiasm. There was, at least, so much of candour in Herod, that he did not treat with ridicule the accounts which came authenticated by unexceptionable witnesses, nor did he ascribe, as the Pharisees had done, any of these wonders to magical influence. The first thought which presented itself to his mind, on being informed of the miraculous cures wrought by our Lord, was one that could hardly have been expected in a person of his character and profession : " This is John the Baptist," said he to his courtiers ; " he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him " That Herod should make such a declaration as this in the presence of his confidential servants, who knew his conduct and opinions, would seem very extraordinary, had not the Evangelists proceeded to

state the manner in which the Baptist came by his death.

We are told that the virtues of that holy man made such an impression upon the mind of the tetrarch, that he not only had the curiosity to hear his discourses, and the courtesy to treat the preacher with respect, but he was led by the arguments and persuasions of John to perform many commendable actions. In all things that did not cross his inclinations, or require the mortification of a favourite sin, Herod heard John gladly; and in this respect he is a picture of mankind in general; for there are few so hardened in vice as to refuse the outward tribute of respect to the labours of learning and the energy of eloquence, when employed with power and virtue in the cause of truth. But no sooner does the faithful servant of God descend to particulars, and lay open the besetting evil of the heart, than the mind, which feels the application, considers the remonstrance as an injury, and endeavours to find an excuse for continuing in guilt, by treating the reprovcr with contempt or severity. So long as John confined himself to the general subject of repentance, or gave his advice in cases upon which he was consulted, Herod attended to him with pleasure; but when the prophet, as became his office, laid open the enormity of that adulterous connection in which the sovereign lived, both of the offending parties were fired with resentment, and the preacher was thrown into a dungeon. It has been observed, that between the prisons and the graves of princes there is but little distance, and the same may truly be said of prophets; but though the enemies of John were well disposed to carry their resentment to the last extremity, they were restrained by the fear of a popular commotion on account of that veneration in which he was universally held by the body of the Jewish people. What space of time he remained in confinement does not appear, but it was

probably longer than might have been expected from the power of his persecutors and the particular malignity of Herodias, who, like Jezebel, thirsted for the blood of the righteous, and fastened upon him, according to the emphatic language of one sacred writer, with all the savage fury of a beast of prey. An opportunity at last presented itself to this abandoned woman, of which she gladly availed herself; and for which there is every reason to believe she made suitable preparations, in training up the instrument selected by her for the accomplishment of her diabolical purpose. That instrument was no other than her own child, by the husband whom she had abandoned; and the time chosen for this atrocious deed, was the birth-day of Herod, which, without thinking how fatally it would end, he celebrated with great pomp and festivity. Apparently to honour the occasion and to enliven the feast, Salome was sent by her mother to dance in the royal presence, where she acquitted herself with so much elegance, that the unguarded monarch made a rash promise, which he confirmed by an oath, to give whatever the damsel should demand, even though it amounted to the half of his kingdom. This was exactly what the artful Herodias had anticipated, from her knowledge of the eager temper of her paramour, and she failed not to take instant advantage of it, in compelling her daughter to return instantly and demand the head of John the Baptist. Bad as Herod was, he could not avoid being affected by this horrible abuse of his unguarded weakness; but instead of behaving like a man, whose honour was insulted, he contented himself with expressing his sorrow on being obliged to fulfill an engagement, which, in this case, it would have been a virtue to have violated. Whatever imprudence there might be in his precipitate declaration, it was nothing when compared with the transgression of which he was

manifestly guilty in the performance of it ; for as no man can bind himself to do an impossible thing, so neither will any vow, however strongly expressed or deliberately made, lay him under an obligation to commit a known sin. The situation of Herod gave him no exemption from this rule ; and the presence of the civil and military authorities of Galilee, instead of being a plea for his compliance with the request, ought to have had the contrary effect, since it became him to show an example of strict and impartial justice, by rejecting an unlawful demand. But so it was, that the fondness of Herod hurried him into a foolish promise, and his want of virtue led him to the commission of a crime which has blackened his memory to endless ages. Well then might this man, on hearing of the fame of Jesus, be alarmed by the remembrance of this atrocious murder ; nor was it any way unnatural for his perturbed mind to fancy, in spite of its assumed scepticism and habitual licentiousness, that "this must be John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded." Scoffing libertines and more philosophical infidels, with all their assurance, are more superstitious than they care to avow, and there are moments when every portent scares them, and the slightest pain affrights them ; when the imagination terrifies them with the representations of crimes which were supposed to have been buried in oblivion, and conscience brings before them the realities of eternity, which in the season of gaiety they laboured to despise. He, therefore, who would secure that peace which endureth for ever, must keep a watchful eye over all his thoughts and words as well as actions, lest, "when lust hath conceived, it bring forth sin ; and sin, when it is finished, bring forth death." James, i. 15.

OCTOBER THE TWELFTH.

THE MULTITUDE FED.

John, vi. 14.—*Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.*

THE base return made by the Jewish nation for the gracious actions and mighty works that were wrought among them, must undoubtedly appear very extraordinary to every one who examines the Gospels with serious attention; and many, perhaps, are disposed to think that their own faith would have been stronger, and their gratitude more ardent, if they had enjoyed the advantages of our Lord's personal ministry. Such persons, however, would do well to consider what use they have made of the blessings which they possess, and in what manner they have improved the degree of knowledge imparted to them, before they form such a conclusion; or pronounce a judgment on the conduct of others. If the Jews were indifferent to the proofs which Jesus gave of his Divine authority, and contented themselves with a stupid astonishment at his miracles, instead of inquiring into their design; too many who call themselves Christians are not only careless about the truths of revelation, but are even regardless of the works of Providence. The order observed throughout the universe is called the course of nature; and as that unmeaning remark comprehends the result of their inquiries, so it leads their thoughts to no higher objects. Unless an eclipse or a comet engages their attention, they view the heavenly bodies and their motions without either curiosity or admiration, resting satisfied with the ancient apology

for indolence and ignorance, that what is above us is nothing to us. To these men the regularity of the seasons and their respective phænomena are nothing more than ordinary occurrences, for the return of which they look as a matter of right, and therefore are little affected by the benefits received from them. With equal apathy they scatter the seed in the earth, and see it shoot forth into the blade and ripening in the ear ; but how the process of vegetation is carried on, they neither know nor examine ; all their thoughts being taken up in the solicitous inquiry, whether the prospect be encouraging, and the gathering equal to expectation ; in which case, if they make no complaint, it is the utmost of their gratitude, and they think little more either of the gift or of the Giver. Of such characters as these, surely it is not uncharitable to conclude, that had they lived in the days of our Saviour, and seen his miracles, their devotion would not have exceeded that of the multitude who were fed by his bounty. They who are unmindful of the ordinary blessings of the Almighty, may indeed be awed, but will not be improved, by the unusual signs of his power ; and that impression which is produced by wonder, will fade away when the wonder is over. Our Lord was followed by great multitudes, who were very inquisitive in ascertaining the course which he intended to take ; and whenever his departure was secret and sudden, they sought him with a diligence that seemed to indicate pure veneration and disinterested attachment. These people professed themselves to be the admirers of his preaching, but in fact they were rather incited by the desire of seeing his mighty deeds than of profiting by his doctrine ; and they were anxious for the commencement of that earthly kingdom which they were taught to expect at the coming of the Messiah. It is probable that they began to entertain some thoughts of erecting the standard of revolt after the death of the Baptist, the

knowledge of which induced Jesus to depart from them privately, to the desert of Bethsaida. To that place, however, the people resorted in crowds; "and when the Lord saw them he was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. And he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God." From this account of the evangelical historians it appears plain that the people were discontented at the want of a leader, and that our Lord took great pains to explain to them the true nature of that kingdom which they understood only in a carnal sense. But the gathering of so large an assembly near the time of the passover, being calculated to alarm the jealousy of the government, the benevolent Jesus resolved to dismiss these zealous followers, after healing their sick, informing their minds, and crowning the work of love with a miracle unparalleled in the history of their nation, and surpassing even what had been accomplished by the Divine Teacher himself, all whose acts proclaimed him to have come from God.

The provisions which the multitude had brought with them being expended, our Lord inquired of his disciples where an adequate supply for so great a number was to be procured; in reply to which, one of them with much simplicity observed, "There is a lad here who hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" Such a remark was perfectly natural on comparing the means with the necessity; nor was even an Apostle to be censured for this expression of diffidence, whose mind could hardly be expected to comprehend the creative powers of his Master. The recovery of decayed limbs and the restoration of life to a dead body, however stupendous such acts might be, were conceivable; and the change of one fluid into another, was equally capable of being realized.

to the mind; but the actual formation of two substantial aliments in vast abundance, without any visible materials or operation, exceeded all imagination. But to Him who made every thing at the beginning, by the energy of his own will, even the loaves and the fishes were not necessary for the purpose to which they were now applied. His use of them, however, and the preservation of the fragments that remained, afforded a convincing testimony that the people had not been entertained with an imaginary banquet. Each person partook of the same bread and animal food which he saw delivered to his neighbour; and as there was no deficiency, so care was taken that there should be no waste; for when the five thousand guests had completely satisfied their appetites, twelve baskets of the remains were collected by the attendants. Thus the miraculous feast, besides evincing the Divinity of Christ, taught his followers several important truths and practical lessons for the regulation of their conduct. Surely if the Lord of all things, before his distribution of these simple viands, raised his eyes to heaven, gave thanks and blessed, it not only becomes us to receive God's mercies with grateful hearts, but to express our obligation in such a manner as to direct others in the way of duty, and to habituate ourselves in that reverence which we owe to the Divine Majesty. "Whether, therefore, we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, the whole must begin and terminate in the glory of God;" for this is the very life of charity, without which the most correct deportment and extensive liberality will profit us nothing. Yet in the example here set we are taught the duty of sharing with the needy the gifts which Providence hath bestowed upon us, and to consider ourselves in this respect as stewards for the poor. Our Lord could have caused an ample supply of bread and meat for the multitude, without making

any use of the five loaves and two fishes; but in adopting these visible means he gave an instance in what manner the goods of this world are to be employed by us; neither to be hoarded up with a selfish regard to personal advantage, nor to be squandered in idle festivity, and for the purposes of ostentation. When the entertainment was over, and all the guests were satisfied, the Master of the feast commanded "the fragments to be gathered up, that nothing might be lost;" which injunction is a rule of admirable concern in the business of life, instructing us to unite frugality with benevolence, and to manage the present bounties of Heaven with a due regard to future wants. Our blessed Saviour would not suffer even his disciples to rely upon his power for a supply of their daily necessities, which they were to obtain by ordinary means, and to husband with a proper economy; it is therefore a sin of no common magnitude to waste the time and opportunities with which we are favoured, in the vain expectation that Providence will support us when we have neglected to take care of ourselves. The life of faith is a course of industry, looking up to God for a blessing upon our labours, and showing our grateful sense of them by a compassionate regard to the distresses of our fellow-creatures. Such are the important uses to be still made of this marvellous transaction, which drew from the wondering multitude a confession, that this must undoubtedly be the Messiah whom they expected, or "that Prophet who, according to the prediction of Moses, was to come into the world." Let us, however, constantly attend to the improvement which our Lord has taught us to make of this incident, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

OCTOBER THE THIRTEENTH.

JESUS IN THE STORM.

Matt. xiv. 33.—*Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

CARNAL minds are as extravagant in gratitude as they are unjust in resentment; for, having no clear principle to guide their actions, they follow the impulse of the will when it is most violent, and think that their conduct must be right because it is justified by their feelings. Thus the multitude, when they had enjoyed our Lord's bounty, began to be persuaded that he must be the Messiah, of whom it was the ancient belief that he would cause manna to descend from heaven. But instead of improving the blessing they had experienced, and properly cherishing the persuasion which it induced, by soliciting his direction and following his counsels, they entered into secret cabals among themselves about the quickest mode of promoting his interest, and of establishing that kingdom of which they fancied this feast was the prelude. Though his aversion to all such schemes was well known, and they had lately heard, from his own lips, that the formation of an earthly monarchy made no part of the object of his mission, these zealots were determined to carry the measure in their own tumultuary way, and without asking the consent of Him whom they intended to honour. So foolish were these inconsiderate men, after witnessing the transcendant power of Jesus, as to think of making him a king by force; which design, no doubt, in their opinion was a proof of affection towards the person whom they admired, when in fact it was no more than incense offered to

their own vanity, in the desire of aggrandizing themselves and their families. As the disciples were not free from the popular delusion, and seem indeed to have been privy to the present design, our Lord thought proper to send them away by water, while he undertook to dismiss the multitudes. It is evident from the narrative, that the plot was carried to a serious length, and it is equally clear that the disciples were reluctantly obliged to quit the scene; both which circumstances will serve materially to explain the wonderful event that followed. Our Lord was repeatedly required by the Pharisees to give them a public sign; by which his supernatural power should be demonstrated beyond all controversy; but it is certain that he never would give either to them or others a mere sign, without any other object than that of astonishing their faculties or gratifying their curiosity. All his miracles were of a beneficial and an instructive nature, intended for perpetual edification as well as for the particular comfort of those who were personally affected by them. To the great object of utility every action was directed; and, therefore, after sending away his disciples and dismissing the multitudes to their respective habitations, "he went up into a mountain apart to pray, and when the evening was come he was there alone." It was necessary that He who came to fulfill all righteousness, and to set us a perfect example, should resist the allurements of ambition and the partiality of the people, endure the ills of poverty, and be exposed to all the horrors of an ignominious death. He had already overcome considerable temptations; but there were heavier trials yet to come, which in all probability formed the subject of his present meditations and prayers. But whatever might be the matter of his devotions, certain it is that his practice was recorded for our imitation; since if He, who was without sin, spent so much of

the night in prayer after a laborious day, how can we, who have so many transgressions to answer for, be negligent in this most important branch of duty, as men and as Christians ! While our Lord was thus exercised on the mountain, his disciples were struggling against contrary winds and a heavy sea on the lake ; and it was fitting that they should be so tried, since, as we are told, " they considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened." Mark, vi. 52. They were so mortified at the refusal of their Master to accept the offer of the people, that even the late instance of his stupendous power and goodness was disregarded, because it did not lead to the consequences which they desired. Doubtless they had with them the fragments that were preserved ; yet even these substantial monuments of his grace could not bring the minds of these men into a state of resignation and submission to His will who ordereth all things right, even when they appear most discordant to the human understanding.

In the midst of the tempest, dark and dismal as it was, the eye of Jesus was fixed upon his wearied and murmuring servants, who, if they thought of him at all, it was with dissatisfaction at obliging them to embark in such a night, and then leaving them to pursue their course alone. Thus too many who have been enlightened by the knowledge of the truth are apt, in the time of danger, to think their lot unmeasurably severe ; that they have been afflicted without a cause, and are left destitute of all hope of deliverance. Forgetful of former mercies, they imagine that their present difficulties are insurmountable, and that, as all human efforts are unavailing, the Divine protection must be either suspended or utterly withdrawn. These very sentiments, and the language to which they commonly incite, afford a convincing proof that the discipline under which the complainers groan was necessary to the correction of an evil which, without

it, would have weakened their faith and injured their virtue. Like the first disciples, then, it is expedient that we should be called to endure affliction, lest ease and prosperity, pleasure and popularity, spread a lethargic influence over our faculties, and incline us to set up our rest in this world, instead of pressing forward for the prize of our high calling in the next. At the fourth watch of the night, and in the midst of the storm, all the Apostles were astonished at the appearance of a person walking steadily upon the rolling billows; and, while they were hindered from making any progress, advancing in the same direction without difficulty. Such a phenomenon at that hour naturally filled them with awful apprehensions; and as they were persuaded that it could be nothing human, their first idea was, that it must be an evil spirit. Great, therefore, was their joy on hearing the well-known voice of their Lord, saying, "Behold, it is I: be not afraid;" and the contemplation of this transition from alarm to gladness will serve effectually to strengthen the mind of the afflicted believer, by raising him above his fears, and discovering to his view the mighty Power, "who alone spreadeth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea." Job, ix. 8. But in all changes from affliction to ease, from despondency to comfort, it becomes us to rejoice with trembling, and especially when we reflect that our past troubles were the consequence of our own errors. Not so the apostle Peter, who, forgetting alike his recent unbelief and timid apprehensions, was desirous of meeting his Master upon the watery element. Our blessed Lord graciously condescended to grant his request; but after a few steps the infirmity of human nature prevailed over his confidence, and the presumptuous disciple was constrained to cry aloud for help, which his Master willingly granted, with a gentle reproof for the weakness of his faith. These

signs were such demonstrative evidences of our Lord's essential divinity, that the persons who were before rebellious and unthankful, discontented with his conduct and ready to abandon him, because he would not receive an earthly crown, came now and worshipped him as the Sovereign of the universe, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God." They saw in these wonders his uncontrouled sway over the powers of nature; but the whole miraculous scene was intended also to show, that the church redeemed by his blood shall be secured by his grace; that notwithstanding the violence of its enemies and the imbecility of its friends, it shall be carried safely through all the vicissitudes of this turbulent course to the desired haven, "even the city that hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Rev. xxi. 23.

OCTOBER THE FOURTEENTH.

THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

Matt. xv. 28.—*Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*

THE history of our Saviour abounds with particular relations and minute incidents, which not only illustrate his character and mission, but afford the most valuable lessons of practical instruction for the conduct of life and the improvement of the understanding. By exciting admiration and interesting the feelings, they quicken the spirit of inquiry, and add powerful inducements to the motives of virtue. There is indeed a peculiarity in all of them, different from the narratives contained in the other books of

Scripture ; yet they acquire importance on that very account, by their connexion with the mystery of redemption, and the assistance they give in ascertaining the nature of saving faith, as opposed to a mere profession. Of this instructive kind is the transaction now before us, which exhibits the influence of religious principle on the mind of a poor outcast, contrasted with the stubborn infidelity of the people who were honoured with the high distinctions of being the chosen family of God, and the heirs of his promises. It seems that our Lord, to avoid the vengeful designs of the Pharisees, who were irritated at the freedom of his discourses, retired into the country of the Sidonians ; but though he took some pains to remain unknown, his arrival could not be concealed from the inhabitants, of which a remarkable instance appeared on the very borders, where his help was implored in the behalf of a young female grievously tormented by an evil spirit. One of the Evangelists calls the mother of the child a Greek, to denote her idolatrous profession ; and a Syrophœnician, to indicate that she belonged to the Phœnician settlement that lay nearest to the coast of Syria. She was of that lineage which had long borne the stigma of reproach, and been degraded even below the rest of the heathen world, by an extraordinary denunciation of the Divine displeasure. Of this she was fully sensible, yet the humiliating consideration did not make her sullen and splenetic, dissatisfied with the ways of Heaven, and envious of her fellow-creatures. The splendour of the Pagan theology, its numerous divinities and pompous services, could yield her no consolation in the heavy affliction which embittered her moments ; and though she had heard that there was salvation in Israel, yet from a participation in that blessing she was cut off by a stern decree. Nothing can be well conceived more deplorable than the condition of this poor Canaanite, who was ac-

acquainted with the power of Jesus, and believed him to be the anointed One of God; but at the same time she knew that his miracles and his preaching were confined to a particular circle, from which all of her unhappy nation were excluded. It was, therefore, an aggravation of her misery to be told that this wonderful Person healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, and cast out devils; for between her and happiness there was a great gulph fixed, which rendered her case hopeless. But when she found that the Redeemer had visited her country, an opportunity seemed to have occurred, of which she determined to avail herself, rather than remain inactive, mourning in gloomy silence the misery of her child. She had doubtless heard of the affability of our Lord, and of his compassionate behaviour towards every class of distressed objects; nor was any instance known of his rejecting the importunate suit of those who applied to him for assistance. The placidity of his disposition was indeed equally conspicuous with the majesty of his works; and therefore this desolate widow, for so she appears to have been, resolved to cast herself upon the unknown mercies of the stranger; though in so doing she ran the risk of being denied by him, on account of her origin, and of being persecuted by her countrymen for the avowal of her faith. Regardless, however, of the consequences to which the confession might expose her, she went forth, and not only solicited help from the Saviour, but openly acknowledged his Divine nature and regal character: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." That she should request the aid of the Redeemer under this dreadful calamity, was not perhaps to be wondered at; but that she should address him by his peculiar title, as the Holy One of Israel, was no less offensive to her own people than to the Jewish residents, who heard her language and

witnessed her conduct. But our Lord passed on, without taking any notice of her confession or prayer. He who was always ready to receive the petitions of the miserable and to pity their sufferings, to speak comfortably to the afflicted and to heal their maladies, would not vouchsafe a look or a word upon this wretched suppliant. This apparent severity was enough to have deterred ordinary minds from any farther application ; and it might have been expected, that the poor creature would have retired slowly to her melancholy dwelling, keenly feeling the neglect with which she had been treated, and abandoning herself to the agony of grief or the gloom of despair. Instead of this, the faith of the Canaanite gathered strength where others would have lost all fortitude, and, as if she thought the silence of Jesus held out a gleam of hope, she redoubled her importunities, and that to such a degree as to excite even the sympathy of the disciples ; who, notwithstanding their prejudices, came and besought their Master to grant her request : “ Send her away,” said they, “ for she crieth after us.” As if to check them for interfering on the behalf of an alien from the household of faith, but in reality to produce a more glorious effect, the Redeemer answered, “ I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This declaration, which was sufficient to put a stop to their application, could not abate the vehemence of the petitioner, who seized the opportunity of this discourse to fall at the feet of Jesus with the fervid prayer, “ Lord help me.” But she had yet to undergo another, and to many it would have been a heart-rending trial, since to the pain of refusal it added the bitterness of reproach, in language of uncommon asperity : “ It is not meet,” said the meek and benevolent Jesus, “ it is neither meet nor becoming, to take the children’s bread and to give it to dogs.” Few would have endured such an opprobrious

appellation without recoiling at the comparison ; and fewer still would have derived from it any encouragement to perseverance. Yet such was the humility and ardent piety of this Syrophœnician woman, that she admitted the justness of the distinction, while from it she drew the admirable application which obtained for her the blessing she solicited. So far was she from feeling indignant at the term applied to her, in common with the whole nation to which she belonged, that she readily owned the Canaanites to be what they were described ; not merely on account of their separation from God's family, but because they were a polluted race, corrupt in their principles and vile in their practices. But while she assented to the truth of the description, she ventured to reason with Him who made it, by urging the plea, that even the meanest parts of his creation looked up to him for a portion of his bounty agreeable to their condition, and without infringing upon the superior privileges of others : " Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Instead of repining at the favoured lot of those who were called to sit down at the sumptuous banquet, or complaining of the unequal distribution, she was content to take up her lot with the dogs of the flock, and thankful for the scraps which the guests cast away as unworthy of their acceptance. Such was the piety of this foreigner, upon whose mind the light of truth had shone only through an imperfect medium, and unaccompanied by any cheering promise to guide her in the way of life. But though born under a curse, and bred in superstitious darkness, she sought the Lord in her distress, and by unwearied exertion was enabled to gain the blessing with this high encomium, the seal of her complete redemption : " O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt." From this instance the sinner, who is awakened to a sense of his condemned

state and polluted condition, is encouraged to throw himself at the feet of the Saviour, who will not fail, upon the exercise of faith and patience, to give him peace at last; for this is his own gracious assurance, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me: and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." John, vi. 37.

OCTOBER THE FIFTEENTH.

THE CONFESSION OF PETER.

Matt. xvi. 19.—I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

MANY serious errors have arisen to the injury of the church, by the perversion of particular passages of Scripture, from the occasion on which they were delivered, and the want of considering the history to which they have a reference. A striking instance of this kind occurs in the strange construction that has been made of our Lord's declaration to the apostle Peter, which has been made to support a system of fraudulent usurpation, subversive of Christian liberty and the source of numerous corruptions in faith and practice. In order, then, to have a right understanding of the promise, it will be necessary to observe the circumstances under which it was given, and the particulars of the Apostle's life; in which case we shall find that it was the prediction of an event to be accomplished by his ministry, and to determine when that should take place. In this advanced stage of the Saviour's personal labours, and approaching as he now was to the period of his

trial and suffering, it became expedient to prepare the disciples for the awful catastrophe, and to make them acquainted with the nature of that kingdom which he came to establish. With this view he began by inquiring what were the opinions entertained concerning him among the people at large; to which question various answers were returned according to the observations that had been made by the respective speakers. That Jesus was a person raised up for an extraordinary purpose, appeared to be the prevailing sentiment; but while his prophetic character was generally admitted by those of the Jews with whom the Apostles conversed, none of them expressed an open belief of his being the Messiah. Notwithstanding their expectation of that great deliverer, they were reluctant in receiving our Lord as the appointed Saviour, on account of the obscurity of his origin, the meanness of his circumstances, and his disavowal of all political designs. The greater part were willing to allow that he might be sent to prepare the way for their promised king; but they still continued to look for signs from heaven, which in their gross apprehensions were necessarily connected with the pomp of power and the pride of conquest. Bred up as the disciples were, in similar prejudices, and desirous as they must have been of their Master's glory, it was no easy matter for them to reconcile their minds to a state of trouble and persecution. It required, indeed, more than common firmness to maintain an alliance with one who was not only destitute of wealth, but who actually made voluntary poverty a mark of his profession; and who neither encouraged popular assemblies, nor courted the favour of the great. At the time when he made these inquiries, he was leading a wandering life, to avoid the revenge of the Pharisees, who were provoked by his reproaches; so that his attendants, instead of seeing their hopes realized and their

prospects brightening, had the mortification to find their condition becoming every day more cloudy, through the conduct of their Master and the malignity of his enemies. Yet such was the conviction produced by his holy conversation, heavenly doctrine, and stupendous works, that when he demanded an account of their faith, Simon Peter replied with that promptitude which was the leading feature of his character, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Though this declaration might express the general belief of the confraternity, it by no means follows that the person who made it spoke in the name of his brethren. The contrary, indeed, is apparent from the whole of the narrative; for had Peter been merely a prolocutor on this occasion, the confession would have been received as that of the community; instead of which, the speaker alone was commended, and to him only was the benediction given, "Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." There was then no consultation among the disciples in this case; but Peter, acting under the Divine impulse, made a full acknowledgement that Jesus was the anointed One of God and the Saviour of the world. This confession amounted to much more than the assertion, that our Lord was commissioned to redeem Israel and to enlighten mankind; to work miracles, and make known the way of life to all nations. Had it implied no more than this, Peter would not have been praised for affirming that which others were considered as deeply culpable in denying. The Scribes and Pharisees were accounted guilty of impiety in rejecting the testimonies which Jesus gave of his being a messenger sent from God. Of an Apostle, therefore, who not only witnessed the mighty deeds of this Divine Teacher, but who was familiar with his manner of life, certainly not less was to be ex-

pected than the admission,* that this was the great Prophet foretold by Moses as the destined leader and instructor of his people. So far as this extended, it was the duty of all who beheld our Saviour's miracles to believe in him ; for the ordinary powers of the human mind were fully capable of judging whether such acts as the healing of diseases and the raising of the dead were the result of a Divine or human power. But beyond this, higher intelligence was necessary to ascertain the dignity of the Person who performed these wonders, and the object of his manifestation in the flesh. To Peter, therefore, who had made so proper a use of the opportunities which he enjoyed, that illumination was imparted, and he was enabled to discern what the most penetrating intellect never could have discovered—that this virtuous and wonderful Person, though poor and despised, was the only begotten of God, tabernacled in human nature for the redemption of mankind. Such was the confession of the Apostle, and the source from whence it came ; nor in fact can the mind of man ascend to that height of knowledge without the help of revelation ; for “ no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” 1 Cor. xii. 3. Here then we may see the precise point where reason finds its limit in religious knowledge, and where, of course, Divine influence becomes necessary to guide us in the way of immortality. We may be competent to judge of historical facts, and to ascertain the nature of moral evidence ; by the same rule we are also capable of appreciating the excellence of our Lord's character and the credibility of his miracles ; but of his incarnation and atonement, we can neither form adequate ideas, nor have a saving belief, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. That the mind of the Apostle was so enlightened in this instance, we are assured by the highest authority ; and that his

confession was an assertion of the divinity of the Saviour, is evident from what followed: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This rock was not Peter, but the matter which had been revealed to him from heaven, even the fundamental article of the Christian faith, that Jesus is the Son of the living God. Upon this cornerstone the universal church is founded; and though particular communions may be removed out of their place through corruption of principles or depravity of manners, yet in no age, however darkened by infidelity or vitiated by immorality, will there be wanting a little flock to follow Jesus as their Saviour and to worship him as their Lord. The privilege bestowed upon Peter in consequence of this declaration, was that of first making known the great truth which he had confessed to the Gentile world, and thus beginning, by his preaching, the gathering of all nations into one fold and under one Shepherd. The promise of the keys of the Gospel kingdom was in fact a prediction of what actually took place when this Apostle, by virtue of a sign from heaven, went and opened the mystery of redemption to the believing centurion and his household. From that period the kingdom of Christ spread and increased, extending itself over various regions; so that while the chosen people, who had been for many ages in possession of the Divine Oracles, became bound in the obduracy of unbelief, they who walked in darkness were loosed from the thralldom of superstition, and entered into the liberty of the sons of God. Thus it appears from the sacred history, that the blessing delivered to Peter was a prophetic promise, relating not to an individual, but to the body of believers, made up of all times and countries to the end of the world. The commission given to the Apostle was fulfilled when he threw wide the door

of life, to those who had long sat in the shadow of death; but the decree is general, and corresponds with that glorious prediction which describes the extent of the redeemed church, and the security of all who are united by faith to the Messiah, as their living head: "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth; nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." Is. lix. 21.

OCTOBER THE SIXTEENTH.

NECESSITY OF THE CROSS.

Matt. xvi. 26.—*What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

OUR Saviour having confirmed the declaration that he was the Messiah, by a benediction and a promise, entered upon a description of the sufferings that awaited him, and which he had hitherto very sparingly and incidentally mentioned, that the minds of his followers might not be shocked at the dismal prospect; but now that his Divine authority was made known to them, it became him, as the teacher of righteousness, to state explicitly the condition to which they were called: "from that time forth, therefore, began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief-priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." He not only informed them that such evils would befall him, but that they necessarily must de-

so, as constituting in fact an essential part of the great plan of redemption which he came into the world to accomplish. Farther than this, he proceeded to show or point out in what way this painful course was connected with the mystery of grace, and why, in obedience to the Divine decrees, he had to endure these things from his enemies. Certainly in this case there could be no absolute compulsion of the will; for the very foreknowledge which he possessed, and the situation in which he was now placed, enabled him to avoid going up to Jerusalem at all; and his hearers might have reasonably said, as they did upon another occasion, "Master, the Jews of late sought to destroy thee, and goest thou thither again?" But our Lord showed that he must go up to Jerusalem, and there submit patiently to the vilest contumelies and tortures that malice could devise or cruelty inflict; nay more, that he must pass from one stage of misery to another, till the sad scene should be closed in an ignominious and agonizing death. All this he foretold and explained to his disciples, by assigning the motives which rendered it necessary for him, as the representative of man, to bear the contradiction of sinners; but there was something in the idea of a suffering Saviour so derogatory to the splendour of the Messiah's character, and so repugnant to the feelings of those who were looking for the redemption of Israel, that Peter could not reconcile the humiliation of Jesus with his possession of all power, both in heaven and upon earth. That the mind of the Apostle should be deeply affected by the awful representation, was natural; and that he should be desirous of averting these calamities from One whom he so highly esteemed, was excusable: but his eager spirit went beyond the mere anxiety of love, and he ventured to controvert what had been advanced of the necessity of these things, protesting with ve-

hemence against our Lord's submission to them. Here then Peter overstepped the boundary of religious resignation, and assumed a province that did not belong to him, of calling in question the rectitude of designs, with the full extent and propriety of which he was not as yet thoroughly acquainted. It was sufficient for him to be informed that the Redeemer lay under an obligation to pass through this state of affliction, and that whatever repugnance flesh and blood might feel at seeing innocence so oppressed, it became man to be silent where his intelligence was limited. The reproof which he received was not more severe than his offence deserved; but it was mercifully intended to correct his carnal notions, and to caution both him and his associates against setting up their reason as a measure by which to judge of the Divine proceedings. Our Lord having shown that the sufferings which he was about to undergo could not be evaded without subverting the design of his incarnation, proceeded to another truth of peculiar importance to us, as it points out in what manner those sufferings will avail to our benefit, and by what means the universal sacrifice of the Redeemer may be rendered ineffectual, even to men who have been enlightened with the knowledge of the Gospel. To profit then by that grace which bringeth salvation, we must willingly receive Christ in his most abject state, because it was in this low and suffering condition that he principally stood, as our representative, in enduring the penalty which was justly due to our transgression. Unless the same mind be in us that was in him, we shall have very faint notions of his excellence, and unworthy ones of his humiliation; but when we are mortified to the love of the world, when we begin to see and lament the heinous nature of sin, and our utter inability to gain happiness, or even to secure any favourite enjoyment; when we

take an estimate of human life, and consider how little of it has been appropriated to the purposes of spiritual improvement; we shall then begin to prize the infinite goodness of Him who came to make satisfaction for our deficiencies, to procure the pardon of our offences, to enlighten us by his doctrine, and to guide us to eternal life by his example. Being thus duly awakened to a feeling sense of our own imperfection, and to the vanity of all created good, we shall be ready to tread in the footsteps of the Divine Mediator, who hath declared, that, to share in the glory of his crown, we must be content to bear the burden and reproach of his cross. But as in this great work no constraint is laid upon the human will, the diligent use of our faculties, and a constant watchfulness over our hearts, will be requisite to the preservation of that grace which has been imparted to us, otherwise we shall be in imminent danger of making shipwreck of the faith, and of increasing our condemnation by wilfully sacrificing the interests of truth for the wages of unrighteousness. As a worldly spirit is the bane of religion, and the canker that destroys every elevated principle, our Saviour thought proper to guard his disciples against its pernicious influence; and there was the greater reason for it, because, knowing from the beginning who it was that should betray him, it was proper to leave even Judas without excuse, by setting before him the fatal consequences of that sin which was then lurking in his heart, and leading him by dark and insidious ways to a crime of incalculable and inexpiable malignity. To him, therefore, did the apostrophe most powerfully apply, though in appearance it had only a general tendency; "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" No warning could well be conceived more strong or explicit than what is contained in

these solemn questions ; yet we have a dreadful instance in this very man, to convince us that the more favoured and enlightened the professors of religion may be, the deeper will be their guilt and the heavier their sentence, if, “ after escaping the pollutions of the world, through the knowlege of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome ;” in which case “ the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” 2 Pet. ii. 20.

OCTOBER THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

Matt. xvii. 2.—*His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

SPIRITUAL knowlege, like human science, is of a progressive kind, both in this world and in the next ; hence our blessed Lord led his apostles gradually onwards in the course of religious discipline, and suffered them for a long time to remain ignorant of the mysteries of faith, till their minds were properly exercised by trial, and the period drew nigh when, in the absence of their Master, they would be called to the administration of his church. But having stated to them the necessity of his going to Jerusalem, and there enduring many bitter persecutions from the chief-priests and elders, who would proceed to the utmost extremity of violence, by delivering him into the hands of the Roman power on a charge of sedition ; he thought proper to constitute three of his disciples the witnesses of that scene, the realizing of which rendered all these sufferings indispensable to his glory and their salvation. He had already signified that he must put himself in the way where

these evils would befall him ; and he so far stated the motives for his acting in this manner, that no serious mind could avoid perceiving that some great, though inscrutable, purpose was involved in sufferings which were considered as obligatory on the part of Him who had to endure them. Beyond this the disciples had no other information respecting what their Master was to suffer, than the fact, that it made a part of the great plan of operations which he came into the world to execute. More minute intelligence would have probably disheartened their spirits and weakened their faith, instead of inspiring them with fortitude and producing pious resignation. It is a gracious order of Providence by which man is kept from the knowledge of future ills, though he is assured that such will inevitably happen ; since, if he were apprized of the time and manner of their occurrence, his thoughts would be drawn from an attention to present duty ; and in devising schemes to avoid particular misfortunes, his ignorance would bring him into others still more distressing. With respect to the Redeemer the case was different, as the very prescience of what he had to pass through, made no inconsiderable part of his trial and merit, by proving his resolution to bear all that was due to the transgression which he came to expiate, and to repair the ruin of the fall, though his own life was to be the price of our redemption. But while he reserved the circumstances of the tragical catalogue within his own breast, he expounded to his disciples the law under which he lay, and the necessity of their conformity to it, as well as himself, if they expected to reach that perfection which was the prize of their high calling and the reward of his obedience. That they might not, however, be cast into despair by the dismal prospect, or remain entirely unacquainted with the object to which his humiliation, in all its stages, was preparatory, he took three of his

followers apart from the rest, to an eminence, where a representation of his glory was made evident to their senses. Why he should have selected these witnesses to so magnificent a spectacle, instead of admitting the body of his disciples to the same honour, may require some explanation, especially as they who had not that privilege must have stood in equal need of consolation with their more favoured brethren. A little attention to the preceding discourse will afford an easy solution of this question, the discussion of which will also serve to throw some light upon the whole transaction. In that solemn charge we find a heavy and specific denunciation against those who should abandon the faith for the sake of worldly advantage, and barter their hopes of salvation for the security of their persons and the acquisition of gain. Our Lord having thus forcibly described the tremendous gulph which awaited such persons, and stated the little enjoyment they should have of their ill-gotten possessions, concluded with this remarkable application: "Verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." It has been supposed that this declaration was a promise, when in truth the very phraseology shows that it was a judicial prediction; for to "taste of death" is to be deprived of spiritual enjoyment, and is no less than the anticipation of that doom, the torments of which are unknown. As such it is expressly defined by our Saviour in his exhortation to perseverance in religious duty: "He that keepeth my saying shall not taste [or see] death." John, viii. 51. He does not say that such persons shall be exempted from dying, for that is the common lot of all men, and to which even He was himself subject as our representative, but that they should not taste the bitterness of death, consisting in the extinction of hope and the absolute loss of

everlasting life. Such being the import of the language, it follows, that there were actually some present who would so taste of death in its most dreadful sense; and that even the apostolical circle was not free from certain of that description upon whom the sentence of excision should pass before the Saviour entered with power into his kingdom. The reason then is plain, why all the attendants of our Lord were not permitted to behold his majesty on the holy mount; for it was not fitting that the son of perdition should share in the antepast of that bliss which was to be the portion of the faithful; and to have excluded one person would have been a premature discovery of what was hidden in the bosom of secret causes, and an exposure of this man to the resentment of his colleagues. In due time the apostate did behold the Redeemer entering into his kingdom with the pomp of victory; but it was when the traitor had the aggravation of finding that what his own wickedness had accelerated was the very means of procuring the grace from which he was for ever cut off; so that, while countless multitudes were about to enjoy the blessing of life, nothing remained for him but the full draught of eternal death. The contemplation of this affecting sight, where, on the one hand, redemption triumphs in the rescue of myriads from destruction; and Christ is justified on the other, in suffering the impenitent to reap the fruit of their doings; will properly lead us to the consideration of that magnificent scene which was exhibited to the disciples, when they not only beheld the glory of their Lord, but were in some degree made partakers of it, by entering into the cloud that overshadowed them. On this occasion two persons were seen conversing with Jesus; and they were not only seen, but known to be Moses and Elias, from the tenour of their discourse, which turned chiefly upon the approaching death of the Messiah at Jerusalem. Now there could be no

need for two messengers, of that quality, to come from the state of felicity with information on a subject which had already been explained to the Apostles; and therefore the matter now discussed, though necessarily connected with the sufferings of Christ, must have extended beyond the mere circumstance of his crucifixion, and the incidents with which it should be attended. According to one of the Evangelists, our Saviour was praying when the transfiguration took place, and while in that holy exercise his entire appearance gradually underwent a change; the fashion of his countenance being altered, and his very raiment becoming white and of a dazzling lustre. But though his whole form was irradiated, so that his face did shine as the sun, the lineaments were unaltered, and the person of Jesus was clearly ascertained in the midst of the uncommon brilliancy by which he was surrounded. This change then was no other than a sign of the recovery of human nature, and of that purification which it was about to experience by virtue of the death and resurrection of our Lord. The cross was the instrument of bodily pain and mental agony, upon which the Mediator so tasted death for every man, as to feel the anguish of that separation from the fountain of life to which we are all liable in consequence of the fall. Such was the prospect to which the attention of the Redeemer was now directed, but it did not terminate there; for as the effects of his sufferings were made manifest in the alteration that passed upon his person, we may justly suppose that his triumph over death, and the restoration of human nature by his resurrection, formed the great theme of that sublime discourse which the apostles heard only in part, being so oppressed with the exceeding weight of glory as to sink into a slumbering state. They saw enough, however, to be convinced that the Divine Power was upon their Master in an

extraordinary manner, that some wonderful revolution was about to be accomplished by him; and from what their eyes could discern and their understandings comprehend, it was apparent that through his death alone could they, or any others, obtain immortality. The change which they witnessed, and the conversation which they heard, were indeed of so delightful a nature, that one of them could not avoid signifying the pleasure that he felt, in the wish to remain on the spot where he had been favoured with this foretaste of celestial happiness. But the voice from the cloud was expressive of arduous duties to be fulfilled as well as of blessings to be enjoyed: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." This injunction was equivalent to the prediction of the Hebrew legislator, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken: according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God; neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not." Deut. xviii. 15, 16. The incarnation of the Son of God hath procured for us this access to the mercy-seat; and therefore having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, we may approach the Divine glory without fear, being justified from all things from which we could not be cleared by the law of Moses. To hear the Son, then, is to receive the word of life from his lips, to embrace his doctrine, to follow his precepts, and to make his holy life the model of our actions. They who so endeavour to conform their minds to his image, and who rely upon his merits for acceptance with God, have an assurance in this splendid vision, that when their warfare is ended, they shall be admitted to a state of increasing perfection, till his

final appearance in judgment, when "he will change their vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Philip. iii. 20, 21.

OCTOBER THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE TRIBUTE-MONEY.

Matt. xvii. 27.—*Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened its mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them, for me and thee.*

IN every action of the Redeemer we may discover some matter for the regulation of our own conduct; for all the principles which he advanced were adapted to practical uses, and they had the advantage of being illustrated by his life and conversation, as well as of being enforced by his reasoning and authority. His enemies, who were equally numerous and powerful, cunning and watchful, would gladly have seized any occasion, if such could have been found, of exposing him as one whose private deportment ill agreed with the doctrines which he advanced, and the duties which he enjoined. They were very desirous of fastening some charge upon him of leading an irregular life, because he indulged in agreeable conversation, and associated with persons who were obnoxious to the ruling powers. In the same spirit of malignity they endeavoured to prove that he was of a factious disposition, and had evil intentions against the peace of the community. But with all their penetration, and they were neither deficient in diligence nor sagacity, it was out of their power to

bring against him an accusation of having violated the Mosaic law, or of inciting the people, by his example, to a contempt of the sovereign authority. He was strict in the observance of the appointed festivals, and he took care to recommend, in his own practice, a conscientious discharge of all the public duties as a member of the Jewish commonwealth and a tributary subject of the Roman empire. Nay, more, to prove that all this arose from a pure and disinterested motive, without being mixed with any artful considerations or accommodating purposes ; he assigned reasons for the rule of obedience, to which he gave the sanction of a perpetual obligation.

Though he had it in his power to abrogate the ceremonial institute at once, and to destroy the domination of a foreign yoke by an instantaneous act, he submitted to all the forms of the one, and carefully abstained from any attempts that might give umbrage to the other. Of this prudent deportment we have a remarkable instance in the manner of his paying some stated tax at Capernaum, where the collectors inquired of Peter whether it was the custom of his Master to pay tribute. What this impost was, does not appear ; but as the question of the officers certainly indicated suspicion, and a doubt respecting his principles, it is a reasonable conjecture, which indeed is strengthened by our Lord's observations, that this was an imperial levy laid upon Judæa, in common with other subjugated states. Had this been a contribution for the support of the temple, as some suppose, it is hardly probable that any remarks would have been made on the payment of it, considering the habitual reverence which Jesus had for the sanctuary ; much less would his remarks have been of such a nature as implied that this was rather the arbitrary exaction of foreigners than a measure of internal regulation. When the Apostle entered the house to inform his Master of the busi-

ness, he was interrupted by the inquiry, "What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom, or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers?" Peter having answered, that this demand was only made of strangers, our Lord observed, "Then are the children free;" by which he could not mean that spiritual privileges exempted any persons from a compliance with the customs of society, for his own practice taught a contrary lesson. The object intended was to impress upon the mind of the Apostle a due sense of the superior value of religious to civil freedom, and to show the nature of that liberty which belongs to the children of God, who are released from the condemnation of the law, and delivered from the burthen of sin. To the same purpose it is said in another place, "If the Son shall make you free, then are ye free indeed;" which the carnal Jews resented as an implied reflection upon their political degradation, instead of regarding the assertion in its proper light, as an overture of grace and the promise of redemption from mental slavery. They who are happily made partakers of the liberty proclaimed in the Gospel, are equally raised above superstitious restraints and licentious indulgence; they seek truth in the spirit of love, and obey the Divine commands with cheerfulness; knowing that in so doing they shall "receive an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." 1 Pet. i. 4.

Remembering that they are placed here in a state of probation, they studiously avoid giving offence, except where the laws of Christ are at direct variance with the customs of the world; in which case they have no hesitation about the course to be adopted, being resolved in all matters that affect the rights of conscience, to obey God rather than man. But while they so determine to follow the line of duty, they are at the same time careful to respect the in-

stitutions of human society in all things which do not affect their religious principles, nor lead to the encouragement of improper practices. Our Lord, therefore, having taught his disciples, that in his community there are no unreasonable impositions nor invidious distinctions, but that all the members are one and the same body in Christ Jesus, expressly signified, that, as his kingdom is not of this world, his subjects must submit to the regulations of the countries where they dwell, in all points that are of a mere temporal concern, and do not by example or otherwise tend to the injury of his religion. In conformity with this rule he ordered the tribute to be paid, though, so great was his poverty, that a miracle was to be performed for the purpose. Thus, from the highest of all possible authority, believers of every description may learn the indispensable obligation which lies upon them to obey the superior powers, and that no excuse is sufficient to palliate either a disregard of civil institutions or an evasion of legal demands. Disaffection to government is not only sinful, as betraying a want of trust in Providence, but it is extremely dangerous to the general interests of mankind, by leading to sedition and anarchy, in which humanity and religion are sure to suffer. It is no light offence, to treat that state with contempt by whose laws we are protected, and it is an injury to our neighbour to elude the payment of those taxes which are required for the public welfare; since, if the revenue is deficient in one quarter, it must necessarily derive a supply from another; so that the industry of men less able or willing to practise deception, may be oppressed to make up for our fraud. The example of our Saviour is so decisive upon this point, that it is surprizing how any men, who call themselves his disciples, can reconcile their profession and practice together, when they endeavour to loosen the bonds of society, by withholding

any part of their contribution to the maintenance of that polity, without which they could not subsist. That which is expedient for all who value their comfort and security in this world, becomes an absolute rule of action to the Christian, whose religion must so shine in his works, that others may be induced to glorify his Father who is in heaven. As, therefore, we do not live for ourselves alone, let us be punctually careful to "render to all their dues; tribute, to whom tribute; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour." Rom. xiii. 7.

OCTOBER THE NINETEENTH.

ON CAUSING OFFENCES.

Matt. xviii. 10.—*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

Nothing could be more amiable or conciliatory, and at the same time awakening and convincing, than the manner in which the Divine Instructor reprov'd the follies and corrected the prejudices of his followers. His censures were always blended with compassion; and while he condemned the corrupt principles which they occasionally displayed, he never failed to set before them such illustrations as were forcibly adapted to put them into a train of self-examination and improvement. Besides the ordinary forms of exhortation and monition, he was accustomed to elucidate the most important truths of religion, by allusions to objects immediately in view. His comparisons were not drawn from remote scenery and rare occurrences, but from the simplest forms of nature and the common events of passing

life. In predicting the future glory of his church and the decline of the Jewish state, he expressed himself in a more figurative style, and made choice of more magnificent images; but when he had to remove wrong impressions from the minds of his disciples, and to inspire them with the love of practical piety, he had recourse to emblems with which they were well acquainted, and operations which they perfectly understood. Thus, to allay the disputes that prevailed among some of the twelve about precedence, he took a little child, and setting him in the midst of the wrangling circle, he thus addressed them: "Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In this admirable way did he restrain their turbulent passions, and, by directing their attention to the innocent object before them, make the contentious apostles ashamed of a behaviour so contrary to the deportment of their Master, and unworthy of the station to which he had called them. The lesson of humility here inculcated upon the first members of the church, must be carefully studied and practised by all who are admitted into that communion, otherwise their profession will be no more than an empty sound, and an unprofitable distinction. It is, however, not an easy matter to bring the mind into such a state of simplicity as to have no other will than that of obeying the dictates of superior wisdom, nor any higher aim than that of devoting every moment and employing every faculty to the Divine honour, without having that anxiety about the things of time and sense, which is the occasion of so much distraction to the children of this world. Our Lord himself signified that this was a work of difficulty, when he said, that the disciple who should be most

distinguished by the characteristics of docility and meekness, submission to the dispensations of God and an unmixed affection for his creatures, should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. That disposition, then, which is here so strongly enforced, is nothing less than a course of moral discipline, which is the more difficult, because it is repugnant to the propensities of fallen man, who is apt to flatter himself that he is doing good when he is seeking his own glory, and that he is living like a rational being, though all his enjoyments are concentrated in selfish gratification. The great Exemplar of righteousness hath said, that we must cut off even a limb and pluck out an eye, if they give offence, either by hindering our own improvement or contributing to the corruption of others. Pursuits must, therefore, be renounced and inclinations restrained, when they are found to have a tendency to draw our attention off from higher objects, or to encourage an inordinate love of pleasure in those whom we are bound to guide in the right way. What we practise must not only be harmless in our own estimation, but it must be perfectly free from every kind of influence that may produce injurious effects on the sentiments or manners of those who are likely to be affected by our opinions and conduct. So high does our Divine Teacher carry the great rule of doing unto others what we expect from them, that he requires of us to be circumspect over our thoughts and looks, as well as our words and actions, lest we should inadvertently confirm any in error, or undesignedly prove the occasion of sin. If such then be the extent of our duty, what an account will they have to answer who intentionally lay stumbling-blocks in the way of their brethren; and who take a diabolical pleasure in perverting the weak by their sophistry, and the thoughtless by their example! Whatever may be the wickedness of private detraction or open persecution, these

are but light offences when compared with the malignity of an evil which bears the closest resemblance to that of man's first seducer; and accordingly a woe of peculiar severity is denounced against those mischievous deceivers who draw men aside from the way of truth. Such indeed is the constitution of human nature in this chequered state, and so potent are the spiritual enemies of man, that offences will unavoidably occur to try the faith of believers; but though it must needs be that errors will come, and divisions arise in the church, woe unto that man who for the sake of pre-eminence, or for the attainment of any sordid aim, shall impose upon credulity, and "beguile men's minds from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Cor. xi. 3. Knowing how rapidly those disorders would spread after his departure, our Saviour took this opportunity of warning his followers against that spirit of pride which was then manifesting itself among them; and to show more emphatically the necessity of their cultivating a gentle and unassuming temper, he took the child up in his arms, and said, "Whosoever shall receive one such as this in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me." Mark, ix. 37. This last circumstance will completely explain that passage in the narrative of the other Evangelist, which is there attended with some difficulty, and has been generally so interpreted as to increase, instead of dispelling, the obscurity. It was evidently, while our Lord had the child in his arms, and after describing the character of those disciples who would shine with the greatest lustre in his church, that he proceeded to caution men against treating them with contempt: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." By these little ones are to be understood the humble believers,

of whom this child was an emblem; and as they are to be received in the name of Christ, and as the ambassadors of God, it is obvious that to despise them is to reject their testimony or to impede them in their labours. The word Angel denotes a messenger, and in the New Testament it is commonly applied to the ministers of the church; probably because they derived their commission immediately from above, by the consecration of the Holy Ghost. But as in every age the Redeemer will have his witnesses to proclaim the message of life, it will be true of all who discharge their office with diligence and sincerity, whatever treatment they may experience in this world, "that their angels in heaven will always behold the face of the Father."

The disembodied spirits of these faithful servants are here, in allusion to the office which they bore upon earth, denominated not merely by a figure, but in reality, and in conformity with the belief of the Jewish church in its purity, the angels of God. The declaration, then, is not to be understood of the celestial hierarchies in general, nor of some tutelary angels appointed as watchers over individuals; but the words of Christ are an assurance, that when these messengers shall have finished their course with joy, they will be admitted to the Divine presence, to render an account of their ministry, and to receive a peculiar mark of distinction in the realms of glory. Thus, while from hence believers in general are encouraged "to look for the blessed hope and glorious appearance of their God and Saviour Jesus Christ," every one who is called to the office of a watchman in Zion, whether in an elevated station or a subordinate department, is strengthened in his work by the Redeemer, who adds, in the language of his Apostle, "Speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." Titus, ii. 15.

OCTOBER THE TWENTIETH.

THE DUTY OF FORGIVENESS.

Matt. xviii. 35.—*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

AMONG the internal evidences of the Divine origin of Christianity, and they are both numerous and incontrovertible, one of the most striking and beautiful is the extent to which it carries the duty of forgiveness; neither leaving it to be regulated by custom nor determined by expediency, but giving to it an eternal sanction, and urging it by motives of universal obligation. With the most enlightened of the heathen nations, revenge was in some cases an heroic virtue; and though the Jews were restrained by their law from acts of vengeance, they had very contracted notions of benevolence; not only limiting the love of their neighbour within the pale of their own community, but even there assigning boundaries to the spirit of philanthropy, and measuring by the rule of convenience the exercise of charity. They were of opinion that mercy was to be weighed out with a sparing hand, and by no means to exceed a certain proportion; while justice, according to their rigorous ideas, was to be so administered as to leave neither room for hope nor repentance. Our Lord taught a principle the reverse of this harsh and unbending morality, by showing on all occasions that mercy is the duty of man, and justice the prerogative of God. Where, indeed, the public welfare is concerned, private feelings must yield to the general good; and they who are in authority, when called upon to punish offences, must not bear the sword in vain.

But the case is different between man and man ; for here no power is given to individuals to avenge injuries, since in so doing they would be actuated by a vindictive disposition, instead of seeking strict and impartial judgment. Human laws and punishments, however, are so far from being repugnant to the Christian religion, that its Divine Author has expressly modified his church according to the forms of civil society, and enjoined his followers to submit the consideration of trespasses to the jurisdiction of their superiors. But neither was this to be done till the other means of reformation had failed, in which case the decision of the elders was to be considered as final ; and when the offender refused to abide by it, he was to be accounted as " a heathen and a publican." Thus, even when the obstinate and impenitent had cut himself off from social communion and religious privileges, he was not on that account to be deprived of the ordinary enjoyments of life, but remitted to the secret judgment of God, and left to the common course of his providence. Though the believer was to look upon the incorrigible offender, so separated, as no better than " a heathen or a publican," yet even heathens and publicans were to be treated with kindness, and their wants relieved, without any consideration of their errors. Such was the line of conduct to be adopted towards those who violated the order of society, and became outcasts by their own obstinacy. They were not by that act abandoned to misery, and suffered to perish ; for the doctrine of the Christian still taught him the feelings of compassion for his erring brethren ; and required of him the same exercise of charity towards their spiritual and bodily infirmities, as was to be shown to all who were not of the household of faith. This was very different from that implacable resentment, which hardened the heart of the Jew and inflamed the mind of the Gentile ; the one withhold-

ing offices of humanity from excommunicated persons, and the other persecuting to death those who renounced the Pagan superstitions. Nor was the Gospel less powerful and gracious in its influence upon men in their private capacity; teaching them in their dealings with each other to be courteous and liberal, gentle and merciful; not, like the Jews, confining their love to persons of the same profession with themselves, but extending it to all the families of the earth. To so elevated a height does this sublime system carry the principle of benevolence, as to enjoin the unqualified forgiveness of trespasses, however often they may be repeated or enormously aggravated. When our Lord delivered this precept, he introduced it with an emphatic caution for its observance; "Take heed unto yourselves;" for, knowing the prejudices of his disciples, he was aware that they would frequently be tempted to transgress a rule which was of essential importance to their own character and the benefit of the church. Peter seems to have pondered much upon this subject, and not being able to satisfy himself with respect to the exact point where forbearance should end, and justifiable resentment begin, he came to his Master with this question: "Lord, how oft shall my brother trespass against me, and I forgive him? Untill seven times?" To the ardent mind of the Apostle it appeared that charity must have some circumscribed limits, and too many are still of the same opinion, notwithstanding the peremptory decision of Infinite Wisdom, "I say not unto thee, Untill seven times; but untill seventy times seven," or an indefinite number, proportioned to the boundless mercy of God. As an illustration of this principle, our Saviour related a parable, in which the characters are finely drawn and beautifully contrasted; the incidents few and simple, yet powerful and affecting. An eastern monarch, on calling his ser-

vants to account, found that one of them was a defaulter to the amount of about two millions of our money, for which the profligate, according to the usage of the country, was doomed to slavery, with all his family; but the generous sovereign being moved by his tears and supplication, cancelled the debt, and received the man again into favour. Such an act of liberality, it might have been expected, would have produced sentiments of tenderness in the mind of this spendthrift; instead of which, he was no sooner out of the royal presence, than with unfeeling brutality he fell upon a menial domestic of the same family, who owed him about three pounds; and because the debtor could not immediately pay him, this inexorable wretch, unmindful of the goodness he had just experienced, and unmoved by the distress of his fellow-servant, caused him to be thrown into prison. The king, astonished at so atrocious a deed, ordered this unprincipled courtier again before him; and having justly rebuked him for his ingratitude and inhumanity, commanded him to be delivered to the tormentors till he should discharge the whole of what was due to the royal treasury. Our Lord's application of this pathetic narrative is general, and concerns all that bear the Christian name: "So shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Thus the representation puts us all upon the same footing as sinners infinitely indebted to Divine justice, and having no other hope of deliverance from the punishment due unto our transgressions than in the fullness of that grace which bringeth salvation through the righteousness of the Redeemer. When nothing remained for mankind but eternal banishment from the presence of the Great King, he gave his only begotten Son to be their representative and surety, by whom every penitent believer has not only the

forgiveness of his sins of omission, but the absolute pardon of his most heinous offences. "If then God hath so freely loved us, how ought we to love one another!" This is the conclusion drawn from the parable, and it is the gracious principle which runs throughout the whole Gospel, so that by this criterion we are enabled to judge exactly our spiritual condition; for if upon examination we find that a deep sense of our sins, and unfeigned gratitude for the mercy we have experienced, have emptied us of uncharitableness, and disposed us to seek the temporal and eternal welfare of all men without exception, then have we good confidence towards God; for "this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him; and hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." 1 John, iii. 23, 24.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE EVIL OF SCEPTICISM.

John, vi. 66.—*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

IN the parable of the sower, whose labours were attended with various effects, according to the places on which the seed which he scattered chanced to fall, our Lord drew a picture of his own ministry, and the characters of those persons to whom his Gospel would be imparted. The word of life is still the same, though, like the good seed of the husbandman, it is in some measure rendered unprofitable through the insincerity and worldly-mindedness of the

hearers. Some are attracted by the novelty of the truth, or charmed with the eloquent manner in which it is enforced and explained; but having no better principle than curiosity, these wayside professors soon become indifferent to that which they admired, and return again to their ordinary pleasures and pursuits. There are others who for a time make a specious appearance of improvement, and seem to be not only in earnest as the followers of Christ, but zealous in promoting his glory. They even make considerable advances in Divine knowledge, and perform many duties with a willing mind; but when the season comes for the trial of their sincerity, they faint under difficulty, and cannot endure to shake off their prejudices. Like plants of rapid growth and gaudy exterior, they soon fade away for want of root and depth of principle, till at length they sink again into the mass of corruption, with the aggravating circumstance of having made a show of religion while their hearts were destitute of its power. Many flatter themselves, that by assenting to all things, without inquiry, contained in the written Word, this naked faith will be accepted as an excuse for their lack of piety; while an opposite set, wrapping themselves up in a fancied righteousness, declare that morality is the essence of the Gospel, which whoever endeavours to practise with diligence, need not be solicitous about speculative doctrines. Now, as, on the one hand, there can be no living faith where holiness is wanting; so is it certain that in the religion which Christ taught, there are no articles that can be justly called speculative, if by that term we are to understand any thing which we are at liberty to believe or deny. Every recorded word uttered by him is of universal import, as constituting a part of that mystery of grace which he was manifested to reveal unto mankind: and as he neither made use of vague expressions, nor performed any insignificant actions,

all that he affirmed and did must be received according to his own representation, and not accommodated to our partial conceptions. Having satisfied ourselves with respect to the evidences of his mission, or, in other words, that his works were divine; nothing more remains for us than to receive his revelation in every part; as well those things that are to be believed, as those duties which are to be performed. For this we have our Saviour's own direction, in answer to the Jews, who wanted to know what they should do to gain the favour of the Almighty. "This," said he, "is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom he hath sent." But it is not sufficient to regard him merely as an instructor, or as one specially appointed with extraordinary powers to make known the will of God to man; for, as far as this confession goes, the persons whom he addressed seem to have been ready enough to allow his claims. He therefore proceeded to inform these inquirers what that faith was which could alone avail for their justification, and be productive of good works. He plainly told them that he was the true bread which came down from heaven to communicate "eternal life unto the world;" and this allusion to the daily food of their fathers in the wilderness, was so familiar an illustration of Divine wisdom, that no offence would have been taken at the comparison, had our Lord contented himself with this description of his doctrine. But when these Jews heard him declare in plain terms that he came down personally from heaven, the pride of reason was alarmed; for judging by their senses, and being acquainted with his earthly parentage, they would not believe an assertion which they could not comprehend. Now if the language of Jesus was metaphorical only, and if the disquietude at first felt by his auditors arose from their gross misapprehension of his meaning, so gracious and humble a teacher as

he would have condescended to clear up the difficulty, by correcting their erroneous ideas. Instead of this, our Lord gave them still greater offence, by declaring, that the corporeal substance which appeared then before them, was the very nutriment of which he had been speaking ; and that the benefits to be obtained by feeding upon it, would infinitely exceed what had been enjoyed by those who did eat of the manna and were dead. There was something in this declaration so confounding to the understanding, and particularly revolting to the feelings and prejudices of a Jew, that, without making any farther inquiry of Him who alone could explain the mystery, the congregation of Capernaum began to wrangle among themselves about this unaccountable doctrine. They first murmured, and then fell into disputes respecting the sense in which this position was to be taken ; and though each contended for his own opinion, no one thought of seeking for the truth from the lips of the preacher ; so that, while all were dissatisfied and contentious, they agreed in this, that the thing was impossible, and that the person who advanced it was a deceiver. These sceptics, like modern infidels, wandered from the light and involved themselves in darkness, because they were too proud to confess their own ignorance. Had they evinced the same eagerness to obtain information which they did to create obstacles and to show their resentment, they might have discovered that the words which offended them were prophetic of some signal blessing, that should be the result of our Lord's humiliation ; and that, as this was the great end of his coming, there might be some mystery about his origin, for the solution of which it would become them to wait with patience. But the spirit of scepticism is incurable ; for they who are possessed by it take a constant pleasure in multiplying objections to what they are afraid is true, till at length

they contrive, by the arts of sophistry, to raise their doubts into axioms, and to give the form of a system to that which has no positive principle or moral obligation. There are some, indeed, who do not go quite so far as this, in their opposition to religious truth; but, like the disciples who thought that the declaration of their Master, in the synagogue at Capernaum, was a hard saying, they want to have every mystery explained in a manner that shall be agreeable to their carnal reason. These persons, on being referred to that period when we shall see, "not as through a glass, darkly, but face to face," fall into an empty profession of godliness, content with believing nothing more than what is consonant to their ideas, and with practising those things only which are suitable to their own inclinations. Beyond this accommodating course they are too arrogant and self-willed, too wise and indolent, to make any advances; and when the Saviour requires all his disciples to bring their very thoughts, as well as their habits and desires, under the cross, "from that time these reasoners and sensualists go back to the world, and walk no more with him." But our obedience must be uniform and without limitation, if we would receive the high approbation that will only be given to those who have persevered faithfully to the end. Let us then examine ourselves whether we are in the faith, not partially but thoroughly, by having our minds wholly submissive to the teaching of Divine Wisdom, in all things expressly and clearly revealed; so that when the Saviour says to us, in a time of defection, as he did to his apostles, "Will ye also go away?" we may answer in the language of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

ON THE CONDUCT OF JESUS.

John, vii. 1.—*After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.*

THAT a person of our Lord's undaunted firmness, who had on so many occasions opposed his inveterate enemies in public assemblies, resisting their pride and confounding their malice, should in this advanced stage of his ministry manifest any thing like timidity and apprehension, seems inconsistent with his general character; but it appears still more extraordinary that he should take shelter in Galilee, from the resentment of the people of Judea, when he had not long before expressly told his disciples that he "must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." It was not in one particular discourse that he made this assertion, nor was it done in an incidental manner; but it constituted the regular subject of progressive discussion after the scene of glory on the holy mount, from which time forth he began to show or explain unto his immediate attendants the necessity of his submitting to public death, with all its tremendous horrors; that the kingdom which he came to establish might commence with his resurrection. This however appeared an inexplicable difficulty, even to those who were apprized of its being indispensable to the great object of their Lord's manifestation; but when to this he added the declaration that his flesh and blood were to form a perpetual repast for believers, many stumbled at the hard saying, and would walk no more in a thorny course,

which required so many sacrifices and held out such dismal prospects, instead of that splendid state which formed the great object of their expectation. The feelings of nature recoiled at the sufferings indicated in this description, and reason was confounded by propositions which appeared repugnant to sense and irreconcilable to equity. But though our Lord had explicitly stated that he must visit Jerusalem, and there endure all these afflictive trials, for the very purpose of effecting those blessings which he came to impart; yet, as the time drew nigh, he secluded himself from public observation, avowedly, as it should seem, to avoid the malicious intentions of the Jews, who sought or conspired to kill him. Some of the kindred of Jesus, who, however, did not believe in his Divine authority, were so far offended at this behaviour, that they attributed it to pusillanimity, and called upon him, in sarcastic language, to go and show forth his extraordinary power at Jerusalem, before those persons who were the most competent judges of his doctrines, and that the people of the capital might also be edified by his works. But notwithstanding these reproaches, the defection of some of his disciples, and his own positive assurances that he must become a victim to the malignant infidelity of the rulers, he still continued to abide in Galilee. What then, it may be asked, could be his motives for so studiously endeavouring to secure himself, at that particular time, from the dangers which threatened him? and why, if there was an absolute necessity for his suffering death in Judæa, did he act in such a manner as showed an unwillingness to encounter the hardships which he had himself foretold? The answer to all this is now evident; for it was not only necessary that he should submit to death, but that it should be attended with peculiar circumstances of barbarity, though conducted with the pompous solemnity of a judicial process; that he

should be treacherously seized through the perfidy of one of his followers, and be abandoned by all the rest; that he should be dragged before the public tribunal as a malefactor, covered with crimes, yet proved innocent, even by the testimony of his enemies, be acquitted by his judge, and after all be delivered up to popular fury, the victim of national frenzy, but in reality a voluntary offering for the redemption of mankind. Now all this was necessary, that what the prophets had predicted might be accomplished, and that what was prefigured in the law might be completed. He was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world;" and the primitive institution of animal sacrifices was nothing else than a symbolical representation of his atonement, without which the whole would have been a cruel ceremony, unworthy of God and useless to man. It was necessary that the Son of God, who of his own will took upon him our nature, should in that nature fulfill all righteousness, and finally be put to a painful and an ignominious death, that he might be a perfect oblation for the sins of the world. Had the design of his suffering been no more than to give publicity to the fact of his resurrection, as some pretend, it is difficult to show why the preceding tortures were in any way expedient; since, as in the case of Lazarus, the miracle might have been completely demonstrated by his lying three days in the grave, and then rising again solely by his own power. But if the crucifixion was not needed for this purpose, much less was it wanted in the way of example, because the patient endurance of ills was sufficiently manifested in his holy life, and the circumstances attending his death were such as none of his followers have been called to pass through. Besides, we find our Lord, in his last moments, evincing a degree of acute sensibility and anguish, which appears astonishing, even to believers, and which some

superficial dogmatists have stigmatized as weakness, for the want of considering the cause of his complaint and its mysterious connexion with the great work of our redemption. The conduct of Jesus, then, in remaining secretly in Galilee, to avoid the vengeful designs of the Jews, who sought an occasion to murder him privately, arose not from the fear of death, or from any anxious concern to shun it when arrayed in its most tremendous forms; but it proceeded, as we have seen, from a principle the very reverse. Compared with what was soon to take place, assassination would have been a kindness to Him who knew that his body was to be ploughed with scourges, and his temples rent with thorns; that after being hurried from one court to another, not only unpitied, but grievously oppressed by accumulated abuses, he should be delivered up to the Gentiles to endure the most ignominious and painful punishment which they could possibly inflict. It is evident, therefore, that with the knowledge of what was to befall him, our blessed Lord, by walking no more in Jewry, while the conspirators lay in wait to slay him, only shunned the lesser evil that he might experience the greater. But here, also, was remarkably verified one of the stated prophecies, which were regularly exhibited of him in the services of the temple; for as the paschal lamb was to be separated from the flock for a certain period preparatory to the feast, so did this spotless victim keep himself secluded till the time arrived when it was proper for him to be offered at Jerusalem, "where he bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes we are healed." 1 Pet. ii, 24.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE POWER OF TRUTH.

John, vii. 48.—*Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?*

WITH this dogmatical question did the council at Jerusalem think it sufficient to silence all who expressed any admiration of the works or the wisdom of Jesus. These bigots being alarmed by the wonders which our Lord wrought, and provoked still more by the doctrines which he preached, endeavoured to cut him off privately before the solemnity of the pass-over, at which time it was apprehended that his ministry would produce serious effects on the minds of the people. Their malicious designs, however, were frustrated by the object of them who came privately to the feast, and taught in the temple with such power as to excite much discussion, and a variety of opinions among the multitudes who attended this great national festival. That the enemies of Jesus did not then carry their wicked purpose into execution is easily accounted for, from the situation which they held, and which made them responsible to the Roman government for any outrage that should be committed, particularly at the celebration of their religious ceremonies. At the feast, then, our Saviour appeared, and so mighty was the word of truth from his lips, that the public were divided concerning him; for while some were irritated against him to a degree of madness, others judiciously said, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" These persons were not so blinded by prejudice as to deny the evidence of their senses; and therefore of such men it might have been said, that they were not far

from the kingdom of God. But when the heads of the council understood that the spirit of inquiry was awakened, they resolved to stifle it in the beginning, and accordingly sent their officers to apprehend the Reformer, as one who disturbed the public peace and instigated the people to sedition. Some address, however, was requisite in the execution of this commission, and therefore the messengers, at first, mixed without observation in the crowd that attended the lectures of this wonderful Teacher. The charm of his eloquence softened even the rugged tempers of these men, and the opinions expressed by his auditors attracted their attention. So favourable was the impression made by the persuasive discourses, the honest freedom, and benevolent actions of our Lord, that many who did not extend their approbation of him to a belief of his Divine authority, could not help acknowledging that "he was a good man." But even this measure of praise, limited as it was, gave great offence to the narrow-minded zealots who overheard it; and they immediately retorted with acrimony, "Nay, but he deceiveth the people." The whole history of the Redeemer hardly affords any higher encomium on the purity of his character than what is contained in this declaration of his most inveterate adversaries, who discovered, while they made it, an eager desire to have impeached his reputation; but malice itself was incapable of fastening any other charge upon him than that which constituted his greatest glory, the incessant endeavour to enlighten dark understandings, to free men's minds from the thralldom of superstition, and to lead them into the way of righteousness. But though he was treated as a deceiver by those Jews who knew that their craft was in danger by the exposure of their corruptions, there were not wanting some discerning minds, who saw in the ministry of Jesus convincing testimonies of his prophetic character; while others,

again, of a more serious and inquisitive cast, having compared what they witnessed with the leading predictions of the Messiah, concluded justly, and confessed honestly, that this was the Christ. This diversity of sentiments increased the uneasiness of the Sanhedrim, for they were aware, that if the discussion of his merits was suffered to go on, the result would be favourable to his claims and destructive of their traditions. Great therefore was their disappointment when the officers returned without their prey; but much greater was the indignation of the council on hearing this reason assigned for the disobedience of their orders, "Never man spake like this man." To the perturbed minds of the Jewish rulers this language of their servants was beyond measure provoking, as it was an indirect, but severe, condemnation of that spirit which could contrive the death of a person for nothing else but explaining the principles of religion in simplicity, and doing acts of kindness without ostentation or partiality. The reply of the officers, brief as it was, amounted to a reproach of their employers no less than to a vindication of Jesus. It said, indeed, plainly enough, "You have, upon report merely, adjudged a man to be worthy of death as an incendiary, as one who labours by his preaching to change the laws and to subvert the state, to destroy our religion and to endanger the country. Now, in pursuance of your commands, we have seen this person, and watched him attentively; we have heard his discourses, and witnessed their effects upon the people: but so far is the doctrine of this preacher from having any evil tendency, that nothing can be more refined from worldly motives; while the morality which he recommends is rather calculated to strengthen government than to subvert it; being drawn from the purest principles, and enforced by the most convincing arguments, so that 'never man

spake like this man.'” That this was the meaning of the messengers is obvious from the bitter reply of their masters, “Are ye also deceived? Is it possible that men of your understandings and privileges, who are in the constant habit of hearing the law expounded by sage professors, and of learning the sentiments of the most celebrated doctors, on questions of the highest importance; can it be, that men so favoured as ye are, should be led aside by one whose origin is despicable, and his education so mean, that he never acquired in our schools the rudiments of learning? But why do you trust to your own judgment in so weighty a concern, instead of imitating the caution of your superiors in rank and knowledge; for ‘have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?’ Look around this venerable assembly, and see among those who for their wisdom and experience have been raised to offices of high trust, whether any of them are favourable to the pretensions of him whom you so inconsiderately admire; or do you find of those who sit in the chair of Moses, and who are deeply conversant in all the mysteries of our religion, any who have condescended to become this man’s disciples?” Such was the arbitrary tone in which these elders and instructors of the nation thought proper to bear down men of plain natural sense, who had expressed their feelings with conscientious simplicity. The evidence of the officers was overpowered by the weight of authority; and that this might be the more effectual in preventing the farther exercise of private judgment, the reasoning, if such it can be called, was closed with a terrible anathema; “This people who know not the law are accursed.” From this narrative we learn, that neither dignity nor talents, age nor profession, must sway us in the study of Divine truth; which, as it is the interest of every man, so is it his duty to apply to it with diligence and

an unbiassed mind. The holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith, the principles of which are level to the understandings of the unlearned as well as to those of the more sagacious and deeply skilled in human science. It so happens, however, that on this very account the wisdom of God is despised by the pride of genius, because it is addressed equally to the vulgar and the great, the illiterate peasant and the enlightened philosopher. But while the haughty scorner, who boasteth himself of his splendid knowledge, is "like the clouds and wind without rain," the humble believers receive daily an increase of grace; for having, in a honest and good heart, heard the word, they keep it and bring forth fruit with patience." Luke, viii. 15.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY.

John, viii. 11.—*Jesus said unto her, Neither do condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

WICKED and artful men are sometimes too cunning for themselves; and by their eager endeavours to accomplish the ruin of others, they frequently bring shame upon their own heads. Of this we have a striking instance in the history before us, which is remarkable on several accounts, but particularly as representing the contrast between the bigotry of the Scribes and Pharisees, and the benignity of Jesus; the arts of those men to draw him into a snare, and his wisdom in turning their malicious designs against themselves. The daily discourses of our Lord in the temple, and the crowds that regularly attended his teaching, gave great alarm to those men who were sensible that both his works

and his doctrine carried plain evidence of his Divine authority; but being determined not to acknowledge him after having declared themselves hostile to his claims, they were perpetually contriving schemes to injure his reputation and to destroy his person. To accomplish one or both of these objects, they brought a woman before him, charged with a grievous crime, and having placed her in the midst of the assembly, they said, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?" It was early in the morning when these zealots came upon this business; whence it is not uncharitable to believe that the whole was a plot, managed throughout for the express purpose of bringing our Saviour into an embarrassment, as an interpreter of the law. This, indeed, is strengthened by all that follows; for while the accusers of the woman were stating the particulars of the case, and vehemently urging the authority of Moses on the kind of punishment to be inflicted on such offenders, Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground. This was a symbolical action, and not designed to show his inattention to what was said, as some unwarrantable additions to the text have represented, but to fix the observation of the spectators, and to convince them by what he wrote on the floor of the temple, that a greater than Moses was there. Every thing recorded of this Divine Teacher had some relation to the great work on which he came into the world, and was intended for our instruction, as well as that of the persons who attended his ministry. When, therefore, he stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, it is not to be supposed that what he did was unintelligible to men so skilled in letters as the Scribes. Both they and their associates, the Pharisees, were close observers of our Lord's conduct; and on this

occasion, especially, their eyes would naturally follow the motion of his hand, when they perceived that he gave no other answer to their questions. But while he was so engaged, some of them still continued to urge him for a peremptory judgment, that they might be furnished with a complaint against him, for having contradicted the authority of Moses, or for taking upon him the judicial character, in opposition to the Roman government. Aware of their design, the Saviour continued writing, and upon their importunity he raised himself with dignity, to make this application of what he had inscribed: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Having said this, he resumed his posture and completed his writing, which the hypocrites inspecting, and every man finding his own guilt expressly denoted, conscience struck him, and he withdrew from the place, being unable to deny the charge, and unwilling to enter into any further communication with this Searcher of hearts. It has been generally imagined that the saying of Jesus produced the conviction which made these deceivers leave the place; but if that had been the case, no reason can be assigned for the orderly manner in which they "went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." It was the writing on the pavement, like that on the wall of the palace at Babylon, which awakened conscience and compelled these deceivers to retire in confusion, as each found his guilt so expressed, that it was impossible to elude the application, "Thou art the man." This farther appears from the circumstance, that the writing of our Saviour ended when the last of the informers quitted the temple; on which, regaining his former position, he said to the unhappy culprit, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? And she said, No man, Lord." The mildness with which he treated this poor creature, is a beautiful

instance of that Divine benignity which shone forth conspicuously in his dealings with sinners who were not hardened in impiety, or who sought not to cover the deformity of vice with the garb of hypocritical sanctity. Instead of passing a heavy censure upon one who appeared to be oppressed with sorrow, and probably evinced some signs of penitence, the Redeemer meekly blended compassion with reproof, and dismissed the woman with the consolation of hope, as an encouragement to repentance; "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." Thus the pardon which he pronounced was only to be secured by an amendment of life, and a circumspect regard to her future conduct. And here the difference of his behaviour to the criminal and to her accusers deserves to be noticed; for while he ministered comfort to the one, he left the others to the terrors of conscious guilt. The reason of this is apparent, since the woman fell into error by temptation; and her persecutors, who were probably in some degree her deceivers also, endeavoured to destroy the righteous under the pretence of punishing the guilty. This woman might have continued to pursue the career of vice all her days, without incurring the vengeance of these reformers, if they had not wanted an occasion to accuse Jesus as a gainsayer of Moses, or as one who arrogated to himself the province of magistracy. In the Scribes and Pharisees, therefore, were united the most heinous sins that can defile the human heart, hatred and revenge, envy and hypocrisy; the want of charity to the frailties of the miserable, and a deadly enmity to the virtues of the righteous. But in the end their wickedness was made manifest, and they were properly left to the bitter anguish of disappointed malice, rendered still more acute by the consciousness that their inmost thoughts and most secret transgressions were known. Let us learn, then, from hence, to pity the weakness of those who

have been ensnared by Satan's devices, and, instead of blazoning their faults, let us throw a vail over them, and endeavour to lead the wanderers back to the way of life. When we are compelled to behold the follies of others, let us call our own to mind; and if we have been providentially kept from any gross offences, let us not be vainglorious, but thankful and circumspect, lest a temptation should befall us, from which, by trusting to our own strength, we may not be able to escape. The scene in the temple was a sketch of one more august and tremendous, which shall be unfolded in the view of the universe, and in which we also must be more than spectators; when the throne of God being set in the clouds of heaven, He who wrote on the floor of the sacred edifice, and who gave the tables of the law on Sinai, shall cause the books to be opened, with the book of life; "and then shall the dead be judged out of those things which are written in the books according to their works." Rev. xx. 12.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

ON FAITH IN CHRIST.

John, viii. 24.—*If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*

It is remarkable, that while the Jews, who were the contemporaries of our Lord, and observed him with close attention, were so provoked by his assumptions as to charge him with blasphemy, modern reasoners, calling themselves Christians, affect to see nothing in his language and deportment but what indicated the refined humanity of the enlightened moralist, and the wisdom of an inspired teacher. But if he was nothing more than what this confession amounts to, the difficulty will be, not so much

to account for the infidelity of the nation, as to explain his conduct in asserting claims, which, in the judgment of his hearers, could not be conceded without raising him to an equality with God. Now, whatever might be the ignorance of the body of the people, it is certain that the Pharisees were men of acute understanding; and that both they and the Scribes were well acquainted with the letter of the Scriptures. In the presence of these men our Saviour explicitly maintained his divinity, and all his lectures in the temple turned upon the important article of his incarnation. "If ye believe not," said he to these learned professors, "if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins." This is a literal version of one of the most solemn declarations that came from Him who spake as never man did; but our translators have weakened its force and obscured its meaning by the addition of a pronoun, which has no relation whatever to any thing in the context. The subject on which Jesus was discoursing, was not his official character, but his native majesty, and the ineffable union which subsisted between him and the Father. The words, indeed, involve two articles of primary moment in the creed of believers; the pre-existent glory of Christ, and his suffering in the flesh for the sins of the world. Faith in him, to be effectual, must therefore be that of a sinner who trusts for pardon and acceptance solely to the merits of an infinite Saviour. They who will receive him in no higher capacity than as an excellent instructor, or as one who hath made new discoveries with respect to the will of God and a future state, must be content with that happiness which their morality can secure; but beyond this they have no higher hopes than the heathen had, who with all their virtue must be left to the uncovenanted mercies of the Most High. Religious faith is a persuasion that Christ is the Son of God, and that he came into the world to save sinners,

as their representative. It is not sufficient to acknowledge that he was a prophet and wrought miracles, that he was the person ordained to supersede the ceremonial law, and to be an exemplar of righteousness; that he suffered death on the cross, and rose again from the dead; that, after founding a church upon earth, he ascended to heaven; and that at the end of time he shall appear to clear up the ways of Providence, by a final separation of the righteous from the wicked. A faith which comprehends these points is possessed even by the spirits of darkness, who are sealed under a decree of irreversible condemnation; aggravated in its horrors by the assurance, that, while they are shut out from all hope, God himself hath provided a satisfaction for human transgression. To believe in Christ then, as he hath himself condescended to explain the nature of faith, is to receive him as our Redeemer who came down from the bosom of his Father, and was enshrined in our humanity, that he might raise us from the death of sin to a life of righteousness; that he might bear the punishment due to our offences, and give us an admission to that state of glory which he hath opened for us by his blood. Now it is evident that this faith cannot be attained so long as we have any idea that our own works will be at all available to our justification; for he who is persuaded that righteousness cometh by the law, will have very unworthy notions of redemption. But when the mind is awakened to see the evil of sin, and feels its utter incapacity to make any satisfaction for past errors, the tidings of mercy, through the virtue of an infinite Sacrifice, will be as the news of pardon to the wretch under sentence of death. The value of the blessing will of course be understood in proportion to the sense which the sinner has of his desperate condition; and according to the knowledge which he has of himself, so will be his gratitude to the Saviour. The Pha-

risees were so fully persuaded of their own moral worth, that the promise of salvation from sin, and the necessity of faith in Him who came to accomplish it, appeared to be nothing less than an injury to their moral character and an insult to their understandings. These men would not believe that Christ came from above, because by so doing they must have admitted what was offensive to their pride, that they were miserable sinners, whose redemption required the humiliation of God's own Son; that they were so polluted as to stand in need of the blood of atonement; that they were condemned by Divine justice, and wanted a mediator; in short, that they were absolutely helpless, and without any merits of their own which could fit them for the kingdom of Heaven, or deliver them from the wrath to come. Now all this was necessarily connected with the article, that our Lord had an existence before his appearance in human nature; consequently in denying this point the Pharisees stumbled at the foundation of the Gospel, and chose rather to remain in their sins than "submit to the righteousness of God by faith." Even some of the Jews, who were disposed to follow Jesus as a divine teacher, fell away when they heard him dwell repeatedly upon this fundamental doctrine; but their defection, and the occasion of it, did not induce our Lord either to relax his claims, or explain the position in such a way as to gratify their prépossessions. On the contrary, he resumed the subject in every succeeding discourse; and, to put the matter beyond all possibility of misconstruction, he soared to the height of majesty, and passing over the patriarchal age, affirmed of himself that he was from eternity, and that to him belonged the incommunicable name which the persons whom he addressed deemed it almost profanation to utter. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am." Now whatever doubts might have been

entertained respecting our Lord's meaning in the preceding arguments, the whole were removed by this declaration, which his auditors understood in no other sense than that of his arrogating to himself the highest attributes of Deity. These men were not the rabble of Judea, but the most intelligent inhabitants of Jerusalem, who visited the temple daily for the purpose of information, and who had attended the entire course of lectures delivered by Jesus in that sacred place. Though, therefore, we should mistake many of the sayings recorded in the Gospels, it is not to be supposed that the persons who heard them were so ignorant of their own language as to take this assertion in a sense foreign from the meaning of Him who made it; and even if they did, a still greater difficulty occurs to account for the conduct of the Teacher in suffering the people to remain under an erroneous impression, without endeavouring to explain what had given them so much offence. Instead of doing this, he silently endured the charge of blasphemy; and when the people attempted to stone him, he passed through the midst of them miraculously, and went his way. From hence we learn, that the doctrine of our Lord's essential divinity is neither a doubtful question nor a speculative point, which we may safely believe or deny; but it is that alone which gives life to the principles of religion, and virtue to every duty. As this belief affords the only remedy to the wounded conscience, in demonstrating the infinite efficacy of that blood which was shed for our transgressions, so is it the most effectual security against the snares of sin, by showing what an immense sacrifice was necessary to cleanse us from guilt, and to deliver us from condemnation; for, "after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing

of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus, iii. 4—7.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE MAN BORN BLIND.

John, ix. 38.—*And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

THE miracles of Jesus were not only splendid proofs of his power and goodness, but lessons of practical utility, conveying much valuable information concerning the kingdom which he came to establish, and describing the different effects of his Gospel upon the Jew, who hardened himself against all evidence, and the Gentile, who without a previous revelation gladly accepted the offer of grace, and submitted to the Messiah as his Saviour and his God. Of this kind was the circumstance which happened when our Lord withdrew from the assembly of Pharisees, whom he had provoked by the assertion of his pre-existence and divinity. Some commentators have represented him as flying from the fury of those bigots; but certainly the narrative does not warrant any such thing; for, on the contrary, he there appears quitting the place with a majesty becoming his character, and confounding his enemies as much by the manner of his departure as he had before irritated them by the nature of his claims. As he and his disciples were passing along the public way which led to the temple, their attention was drawn to the miserable situation of a beggar, who had been blind from his birth. The low state of religious

principles at this period, is sufficiently clear from the strange question propounded to our Lord by some of his followers, on the case of this afflicted object, who was obliged to earn a precarious subsistence by soliciting alms of those who went to offer their devotions in the sanctuary. Instead of pitying the condition of this wretched being, and recommending him to the kindness of their Lord, they said, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" To account for this seeming want of charity, it should be considered that the Jews, after the last captivity, carried the belief of original sin so far, as to suppose that the actual guilt of parents was transmitted to their posterity. This notion they imbibed from their intercourse with some of the eastern visionaries, who also taught them, and the philosophers of Greece, the mystic fable, that the present life is a state of degradation, in which every man suffers for his former delinquency. The answer which the disciples received, was intended to show, that in this probationary course the duty of man is to study the will of God in his revealed word, and to avoid all questions which tend to strife, or that do not minister to edification. Much has been said on the origin of evil, but few, it is to be feared, examine strictly that which is in their own hearts, and compare what prevails there with the history of the fall; for, if they did, they would perceive that idle curiosity, pride, and inordinate desire, are the sources of all the ills which distract their quiet and hinder their improvement. The disciples wanted information on an intricate subject; but their Lord told them, that he came into the world to do the works of his Father in the time allotted for his mission, and that the present was one of those occurrences which would admit of no delay. He thought proper, however, to correct the error into which they had fallen, respecting the communication of guilt, by saying,

that neither had this man sinned nor his parents, in the way which they supposed; but that this calamity, whatever they might think of it, was an act of Divine wisdom and goodness towards the afflicted object himself, and to the moral world, of which, in his dark and helpless state, he was an exact emblem. Thus we learn that all evil, in some way or other, is productive of good, and directed to the advancement of the glory of God, even when the immediate agents are thinking of nothing but their own designs, and when those who suffer are by their circumstances deprived of hope. While our Saviour was instructing his disciples on the necessity of active piety, he approached the blind man, and having anointed his eyes with clay, directed him to wash in the pool of Siloam, which lay at the foot of Mount Sion. To this injunction carnal reason, especially in one who could have no proper conception of miracles, might have objected, that the way was hard to find for a person in his condition; and, besides, that the means employed were of such a nature as to be incapable of doing him any good; that clay was more likely to injure the parts than to open his eyes, and that the waters of Siloam were never known to possess any medicinal virtue. In some such way would an indolent sceptic have evaded the command, while the presumptuous Pharisee would have treated the whole process with contempt, attempting to demonstrate with great parade of philosophical argument the utter impossibility of giving sight to a man born blind. But the man, who knew little more than the name of his benefactor, did not stop to consider what was to be done, or make any inquiries of his neighbours about the propriety of what was enjoined. He patiently submitted to what our Lord performed upon his eyes, and groped his way to the place appointed, where he washed according to the directions he had received, and came back, seeing. This miracle

quickly became the *subject of conversation in that* part of Jerusalem; but it being the sabbath-day, some of the most scrupulous inhabitants thought it right to bring the man before the supreme council. The news of this marvellous act came like a thunderbolt upon an assembly which had just passed a decree, that if any person confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, he should be excommunicated. This was done out of revenge, because our Lord had explicitly asserted his Divine glory. Great, therefore, was the astonishment of the Pharisees when they heard of this unequivocal evidence of his verity; but instead of retracting their unrighteous deed, they proceeded with the utmost virulence and cunning in their attempts to fasten the charge of imposture upon the person who had been relieved. To this end they examined both him and his parents with rigorous exactness; but when all their efforts to draw the man into an acknowledgement of fraud proved in vain, they had recourse to the last act which lay in their power, that of cutting this poor creature off from the benefits of their religion and the enjoyment of civil society. In this desolate state was he found the second time by the Redeemer, who came to seek and to save those who were lost. The beggar, for witnessing a good confession, was cast out of the Jewish communion, but he was admitted into that spiritual body of which Christ is the living head. His corporeal blindness made him acquainted with Jesus, and his wonderful cure brought upon him the terrors of excommunication; but when he was despised and persecuted by men, the Saviour of sinners took him up and incorporated him into his family. When our Lord made himself known to him as the Son of God, he believed the word of truth; and he showed the sincerity of his faith, not merely in a verbal profession, but by falling down at his feet and worshipping him. As this poor man in his whole conduct ex-

hibited a striking contrast to the Pharisees, who remained blind while they pretended to superior light and holiness; so was he an emblem of the Gentiles, who were, like him, plunged in darkness, till, upon the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews, their eyes were opened; and then was fulfilled the prophetic edict, "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled; who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear and say, It is truth." Is. xliii. 8, 9.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

ON INTEMPERATE ZEAL.

Luke, ix. 55, 56.—*But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*

IN nothing has the blundering malice of infidels been more conspicuous than in charging the Christian religion and its Founder with intolerance; for if it be allowable to select any particular virtue as pre-eminent, where every thing abounds that can exalt human nature to the highest perfection in this life, it is the Divine benignity which runs through all the precepts of the Gospel, as well as in the several actions of our Redeemer. The patience which he displayed in enduring the contradiction of sinners, and submitting to the greatest tortures that malice could devise or cruelty inflict, was only equalled by his readiness to do good for evil, to relieve the afflicted of every description, and his liberality to those who treated him

with rudeness and ingratitude. Nor did the system laid down by him for the government of his church and the conduct of his followers, in any respect differ from the beautiful example which he uniformly set them, of love and forbearance, humility and resignation. It is true, he was also distinguished by his zeal ; but this was of the noblest kind, and never appeared for any other purpose than that of vindicating the Divine honour and the freedom of the human mind, against those who had been injured, both by tyranny and corruption. But while he prophetically denounced heavy judgments upon all who should pervert the ways of others by licentious principles, or by making additions to the Word of God, he neither employed the sword himself, nor authorized the use of it by his disciples, for the propagation of his religion. The zeal which shone so brightly in our Lord, was an unmixed devotion to the cause of truth, and an unwearied endeavour to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind. The only weapons which he allowed in his service were those of reason and persuasion, meekness and fortitude, a constant study of the Divine will, and the cultivation of every grace that could recommend his faith to the inquiring mind, or overcome the prejudices of the world. The persons who have borne his name, have not indeed uniformly acted by his rule ; and in too many cases, it is to be lamented, that his example has had little influence on those who have professed the profoundest veneration for his character. Even while he was upon earth, some of those who lived in the closest intimacy with him, were occasionally misled by their passions into an erroneous idea of their duty, and thought they could not show a proper affection to the Saviour without resenting the ill treatment which he received from unbelievers. But whenever such instances occurred, they who discovered that spirit were reproved with

severity, to make them, and all who should come after them, sensible that He who had legions at his command could stand in no need of human interference to avenge his honour or to advance his purposes ; and that his religion was to be formed in the hearts of men by the force of inward conviction alone, without the operation of violence or the influence of Divine judgments. Charity is the vital principle, without which faith is dead ; and this virtue admits not of that fiery zeal which would destroy men's bodies for the good of their souls, but is manifested in gentleness and forbearance ; the exercise of good works, even to the unthankful, and a spirit of love towards all who are in the darkness of error and the bondage of sin. What that charity is which believers are to display in their intercourse with the world, our Lord exemplified in his journey through Samaria, at the approach of the feast of dedication. This was in the high road from Galilee to Jerusalem ; and when the inhabitants of one of the villages perceived that these persons were going up to the temple to worship, they refused to grant them those ordinary necessities which were allowed to all travellers. The Samaritans were schismatics, who blended idolatry with the Mosaic ritual ; and had a temple of their own, which they considered as more holy than that of their neighbours. There was, therefore, a mutual jealousy between these two communities ; and it must be acknowledged that the Samaritans could not be more uncharitable to the Jews than these were to the Samaritans. They hated each other, because both placed religion in outward distinctions, and an attendance upon particular places, without considering that God is no respecter of persons ; that he regards only purity of mind ; and that where this is found, the Divine presence is communicated, whatever be the circumstances of the possessor, or the spot on which he

resides. The Jews, however, would have no dealings with the Samaritans ; and among these people, again, there was so much bigotry, that when they saw Jesus and his disciples going on a religious account to Jerusalem, they withheld from them, on that account only, the common refreshments of hospitality. This was a very gross provocation ; but when two of the disciples asked leave to call down fire from heaven upon the village, their Master told them that they were ignorant of that merciful dispensation under which they were called ; for that “ he was not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Having thus informed them that the spirit of the Gospel differed from that of the law, and that while the one was ministered with temporal judgments, the other wholly excluded them, our Lord showed what should be the behaviour of his people in every trial of this kind, “ by going to another village.” All the Samaritans were not like those who had behaved so uncourteously ; and thus, by seeking entertainment elsewhere, the Redeemer of men did that which is recommended by one of his most zealous disciples, “ heap coals of fire upon the heads of the uncharitable ;” melting them with kindness, and leaving them to the silent reproach of their own consciences.

The inhabitants of the inhospitable village had no doubt many relations in other places, to whom this forbearance of the great Prophet must have appeared in a most amiable light ; so that though the brutish people themselves might not be properly affected by it, their brethren, of more enlarged minds, would hardly fail to compare the mild benevolence of the Gospel with the churlish meanness of their countrymen, and the malignant asperity of the Jews. But whatever effects our Lord’s behaviour had upon those who observed it, nothing can be clearer than the lesson which it inculcates upon all who are called

by his name ; since, if he has declared that he came not to destroy but to save men's lives, it is impossible that we can be conformed to his image, so long as we indulge the passion of anger, or cherish any ill will against those for whom he poured out his precious blood upon the cross. Let us then daily endeavour to mould our tempers after His example, " who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously." 1 Pet. ii. 29.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS.

Luke, x. 18.—*I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.*

WHEN our Saviour performed his great cure upon the man born blind, he said to his disciples, " I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day ; the night cometh, when no man can work." That day was the period of his personal ministry upon earth ; and the miracle which he then wrought, was a representation of the change to be effected by his Gospel in the condition of the moral world. Soon after that transaction Jesus chose seventy of his disciples, and sent them to announce his approach to those places which he intended to visit. These persons were endowed with powers similar to those which had been conferred on the twelve Apostles ; but with this difference, that their sphere of action was circumscribed and the time limited. This mission was to be despatched in haste, and with good reason, for the time drew nigh when their Master was to terminate his labours ; as, therefore, they had

much to do in a short space, they were cautioned not to waste any part of their time in needless inquiries and unprofitable speculations. What was enjoined to these disciples is in some measure necessary to be observed by all Christians who have to prepare for a kingdom, and an uncertain period allotted them to secure that great object; during which space they have to encounter many dangers, and to resist numerous temptations. But if they would obtain the prize of their high calling, and receive the approbation of Him who hath given them the benefit of his example as well as of his instructions, they must press forwards with diligence, as men who are in haste, and have no time to bestow upon the cares and vanities of this world. They are at present in the country of an enemy, who will beset them by his wiles and snares, if he cannot raise against them the terrors of persecution; it becomes them, therefore, to be always upon their guard, and, while engaged in religious duty, "to salute no man by the way." They are not required to separate themselves from society, or to be deficient in the civilities of life; but to persevere firmly in the course which Divine Wisdom hath laid down for them; neither suffering themselves to be drawn aside from it by the courtesies of their acquaintance nor the menaces of their superiors. By acting in this manner they will find, however weak they were at first, that their strength increases daily; and, like the seventy disciples, their account will be rendered up with joyful surprise, that they have been enabled through grace to do more than ever they could have expected. When those faithful messengers returned with a report of their labours, they observed with grateful astonishment, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us, through thy name!" In their commission the power of healing the sick of all descriptions was expressly mentioned; the wonder of the disciples, therefore,

would be wholly unaccountable if demoniacal possessions had been nothing more than bodily or mental diseases. But that these visitations were in fact much more than modern reasoners will allow, and that they were in reality what all antiquity believed, the operations of invisible beings upon the human mind, is evident from the answer of our Lord ; " I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." The seventy spake with rapture of having expelled evil spirits from the bodies of men ; and Jesus replied, that this was not so much a matter of wonder, when he had seen the apostate leader of those beings, the prince of darkness himself, precipitated from the zenith of his dominion, and abridged of his faculties. Here, then, the existence of these invisible agents was maintained in the most positive language, and by the statement of facts known to witnesses who could not be deceived ; for He who is the Truth itself confirmed what his messengers had described, by stating the cause of those strange things which excited their astonishment. But he went still farther than this, and gave to all his disciples, as well those who were to come as those who then heard him, " power over the enemy ;" which could not mean natural evils, for to these all believers are equally liable with the rest of mankind ; neither was the world that enemy, for the disciples were immediately warned against being elated by the superiority which they should acquire, but told so to rejoice rather because their names were written in heaven. Now in the world they were to suffer great hardships and severe trials, even to the laying down of their lives for the truth ; the adversary, then, over whom they were to have power, was that identical being described by our Lord as falling with the swiftness of lightning from the height of his glory. Satan is the proper name of the evil one, who is said to work in the children of disobedience, among whom he has his kingdom and his throne.

When the Redeemer came upon earth, the effects of the Apostate's influence were much more obvious and terrible than they have been since; so that we can form but very inadequate ideas of those awful calamities which in the sacred books are ascribed to his operation on the human mind. That we do not perceive such scenes, or that any of a like kind have not since been properly attested, cannot be admitted as a reason for disbelieving the literal account of the Gospel demoniacs; but the contrary, because we have the authority of our Saviour himself for the fact, that Satan, the author of these miseries, was then rapidly falling from his seat; which clearly implied that his sway, in this particular manner, was confined, for special purposes, to that age. But though by the light of the Gospel this dominion of darkness has been contracted, and the power of the evil spirits vastly diminished, it does not follow that the agency of these active beings is contemptible, or that they have little to do with the human mind in its present enlightened state. They may not indeed exercise any of that outrageous violence over our thoughts, which characterized their presence in the demoniacs of old; but wherever envy, hatred, or malice prevail; where ambition and vanity constitute the ruling temper, or discontent and avarice corrode the heart; where, in short, the "lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are found, there the prince of this world hath still his throne and his vassals. So long as we indulge any one carnal propensity, any evil habit, or unholy desire; so long as we give way to unruly passions, and are pleased with the follies of a luxurious and profligate age, so long are we exposed to the worst influence of the tempter, who is better acquainted with our hearts than we are ourselves. Let us then, if we would avoid falling under his absolute dominion, watch all the avenues by which he can gain an admittance into our affec-

tions; for though he prowleth continually about, as a beast of prey, it is not unusual with him to assume the appearance of an angel of light. Having, therefore, the knowledge of our condition plainly revealed, and the means of grace expressly promised, for our guidance and assurance in this probationary state, let us take the greater heed to our ways, "lest Satan gain an advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." 2 Cor. ii. 11.

OCTOBER THE TWENTY-NINTH.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

Luke, x. 37.—*Go and do thou likewise.*

THE wisdom of our Divine Teacher was remarkably displayed in his prompt manner of giving instruction without any previous study; and in so framing his discourses, that, while they were exactly adapted to the circumstances in which they were delivered, they also involved doctrines of the deepest import, and taught lessons of universal obligation. All his parables were of this description, conveying with the plainest directions for the conduct of life, correct delineations of the economy of grace. One of the most beautiful of these figurative representations is that which was delivered as an answer to the question of a lawyer, "Who is my neighbour?" This man affected to be an inquirer after truth, and to court information concerning the means of obtaining eternal life; but in reality he had no other motive than that of drawing our Lord into some assertion which might be brought as a charge against him, for advancing positions contrary to the fundamental principles of the national religion. The Discerner of hearts having penetrated into his designs, asked him

in return for a statement of the commandments; on which the lawyer repeated a summary of the decalogue in its two great divisions; and was told, that if he truly performed all those duties he should be saved. This vainglorious professor, however, who had no doubt of his own moral perfection in fulfilling all these things, and yet wanted to justify himself, demanded the extent of the second table, and who those persons were to whom he should show his love according to what was there enjoined. To lower the pride of this Jewish doctor, and to instruct the persons present in the true nature of those concise precepts, Jesus related this pathetic narrative, of which the lawyer was left to make the application. A certain man in his journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell into the hands of a savage banditti, who not only robbed him of his little property, but stripped him of his garments, inflicted many dreadful wounds upon him, and then left him in the road to perish. In this miserable condition, without being able to crawl out of the way, or to supplicate relief, the poor traveller lay exposed to the inclemency of the weather and the fury of ferocious animals. Such was the object that presented itself to the eyes of a passenger, who was not only of the same nation with the wounded man, but a member of that sacred profession which must be supposed to teach humanity, both by precept and example. But though the priest beheld this sad spectacle, he neither stopped to administer comfort to the wounded man, nor even to inquire into the particulars of his case; but took another direction, as if for the purpose of avoiding a similar misfortune, and went his way. Shortly afterwards a Levite appeared, who paused, indeed, to contemplate his wretched countryman; but it was only to indulge an uncharitable curiosity, which having gratified, he also passed by on the other side. When these ministers

of religion were gone, another person came up to the spot, but this was one of that proscribed race with whom the Jews would have no dealings, and, therefore, could have no right to expect any thing in return but stern contempt and unfeeling neglect. But this traveller, though he was a Samaritan, on perceiving the afflicted Jew, was moved with compassion, and instantly alighted to give him relief. Having examined the wounds, he cleansed them first with wine, then poured into them balsamic oils, and bound them up with tenderness; after which he lifted the helpless creature in his arms, laid him on his own beast, and conveyed him slowly to the next inn. Had the story ended here, the greatest admiration would have been due to such exalted charity; but the benevolence of the stranger went still farther than this; for knowing the destitute condition of the poor man, and the want of liberality in his countrymen, he left money with the host to take proper care of him, and promised to discharge all other expenses that might be incurred in the perfection of the cure at his return. When the parable was ended, our Lord asked which of the three had acted the part of a neighbour in this case; and, reluctant as the lawyer was to name one whom he hated, truth compelled him to say, "He that showed mercy on him;" to which answer Jesus rejoined with emphatic dignity this universal precept, "Go, and do thou likewise." The moral of this divine apologue, then, is sufficiently obvious from this application; but there is somewhat more in it than the refined instruction, to lay aside all prejudice and partiality in our intercourse with mankind, and particularly in the exercise of pity and beneficence to those who are in sorrow and distress. We are here taught the true principle by which all our actions should be guided; and this instance directs us to show that mercy unto others which Christ our Sa-

viour hath bestowed upon us. The certain man, in the parable, is a representation of human nature in its fallen state, or, which is the same thing, the lapse of Adam from holiness and happiness to sin and misery. In this condition man became a prey to thieves; to those carnal desires which stripped him of his innocence, deprived him of power, and left him to destruction. The priest and the Levite were the patriarchal and legal dispensations, which could do no more than recognize the distressed object, and ascertain the cause of his malady; but could neither heal the wounds nor remove the wretched being from the place where he lay. The wound that was inflicted upon him was sin; which lustration and sacrifice could not cleanse; and which was aggravated in misery, instead of being alleviated or removed by the knowledge of the law. But what these typical institutions could not accomplish, was fully effected by the Divine Person who came after them, even that blessed Stranger who was despised and rejected of men, stigmatized by the Jews as a Samaritan, persecuted through the whole course of his benevolent life, and doomed at last to a painful and ignominious death, which he endured patiently, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." 1 Pet. iii. 18. Surely, then, if this divine Saviour so loved us when we were dead in trespasses and sins, as to shed his precious blood, that by virtue of it we might be cleansed from all impurity, and be made partakers of eternal life; if he did all this for us when we were alienated from him in spirit, and enemies to him by our works, how ought we to show our gratitude for this unspeakable gift—by conforming ourselves to his example, in the performance of his dying injunction, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you that ye also love one another." John, xiii. 34.

OCTOBER THE THIRTIETH.

MARTHA AND MARY.

Luke, x. 42.—*One thing is needful.*

AMONG the advantages resulting from the historical form in which the Christian religion has been transmitted to us, this is not the least, that hereby we are instructed in every branch of duty, private as well as public, by the narration of the minutest circumstances in the life of our Saviour. The incidents recorded of him were intended to teach us how we should employ our time and regulate our conduct in those necessary offices which we may be called to discharge in this probationary state. When we read the memoirs of other illustrious characters, we find them occupied with accounts of uncommon adventures or splendid achievements, arduous labours, and useful discoveries. Such information, no doubt, is both agreeable and profitable in many respects; but after all it is but of limited utility, and is little adapted either to improve the temper or to assist man in the ordinary business of life. The holy Gospels, on the contrary, while they exhibit the most astonishing history of condescension in the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God, present us also with instances of his familiar behaviour, by which persons of all conditions are taught how to improve the opportunities which they enjoy, and in what manner they may secure that happiness which is the object of universal desire. The Evangelists do not confine themselves to the miracles which our Lord performed, and the disputes in which he was engaged; but they enter also into the privacies of his conversation, and the relation of those occurrences which, however trivial they may appear to superficial

minds, will be found interesting to every one who wishes to pass through the world without reproach, and to end his course with joy. One of these edifying incidents happened when our Lord was on his journey to Jerusalem, for the purpose of celebrating the dedication of the temple; which solemnity he attended, though it was no more than a human appointment, that he might avoid giving offence by a spirit of separation from the established worship, merely on account of things indifferent. On coming to Bethany, he took up his lodging with a family that was very much endeared to him by the amity which distinguished its members, and of whom another evangelist has recorded, that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." John, xi. 5. Ever intent upon the great work for which he came into the world, this Divine Instructor spent no part of his time in needless inquiries or unprofitable discourse; but even here, at Bethany, wearied as he probably was by travelling, he preached the Gospel of the kingdom. While he was so engaged, Mary, the younger of the two sisters, sat at his feet, listening with fixed attention and humility to the precious words which came from his lips; but Martha, the mistress of the household, being desirous of paying the greatest respect to her guest, was cumbered about much serving. This intense application to domestic affairs produced an indifference to those weightier concerns which engaged the consideration of her sister; and though Martha had both religious knowledge and fervent piety, yet, at this time, an excessive solicitude about worldly cares ruffled her temper, and rendered her peevish and uncharitable. This is by no means an uncommon case; for we often see persons of very good characters and amiable dispositions, who, by an over-anxiety to be useful and to provide things necessary for their families and friends, seem as if they thought

of nothing else. They are always in a state of agitation, and the concerns of time are ever on their lips; either they are talking with complacency of what they have been doing, expressing their sorrow at the failure of well-concerted schemes, or proposing matters, which they trust will turn out better, and prove beneficial to themselves and those who come after them. Now, these good people imagine that this excessive care is no more than the pressure of an indispensable obligation, and that they are called so to act in the course of Providence, for the discharge of a special trust. It is true, they will sometimes lament that the business of this life occupies so much of their time and thoughts, that they are frequently incapacitated for a due attention to higher objects; but this they regard as their misfortune, not being aware, that, by suffering the world to be continually in their heads, it has gained at last an evil ascendancy over their hearts. It was nearly so in the present instance; Martha thought she was acting in the way of duty, by making these preparations for the accommodation of one whom she revered; but our Saviour would not have esteemed her the less if she had contracted all this care within the compass of moderation. Had she attended to some of that heavenly discourse which so delighted Mary, she would not only have improved her understanding, but have preserved her temper. But Martha heard none of those salutary truths which were then delivered under her roof; and thus, by neglecting the word of life, and busying herself about earthly things, she became perplexed and lost her patience. Instead of seeking for the cause of this uneasiness in the irregularity of her mind, and the impropriety of her behaviour, her resentment was turned against Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus, when, according to the judgment of her provident sister, she ought to have been employed in the affairs of the household. On presuming to

make a complaint of this fancied negligence to our Lord, he thus addressed her: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Our Saviour does not say that the things about which Martha was so intent were of no moment, or that they might be entirely omitted for the sake of religion; neither did he so commend the piety of Mary as to raise the life of devout contemplation above that of active virtue. His own conduct showed the reverse of this; for he both recommended and practised economical prudence in the management of time and the ordering of his affairs; while so far was he from leading or enjoining an ascetic life, that both he and his disciples were continually employed in the labour of doing good. But he re-proved Martha for an inordinate regard to worldly things, and making them the first objects of her consideration, when they ought to have occupied only a limited attention, especially as she could not expect to enjoy many opportunities of hearing the word of life from his mouth. Mary, on the other hand, was deserving of praise for honouring her Saviour in the most acceptable way, by attending diligently to the glad tidings which he came to impart. Our Lord discovered the hearts of both these sisters, and he loved them both, because he knew that they were actuated by a spirit of sincere affection to his person, and that they truly believed in his Divine authority. He manifested this love in the purest manner, by warning Martha against that worldly spirit which was so injurious to her peace of mind; and by comforting Mary in the wise choice which she had made, of placing all temporal matters in a state of subserviency to that which can alone be called an indispensable concern, the salvation of the soul. All things necessary to our bodily comfort and con-

venience ought certainly to be provided, and used with a due regard to our present and future wants; but this duty should be managed in a spirit of resignation to the Divine will, and subordinately to that great business of improving our minds in Divine knowledge, and in the exercise of those good works "which must invariably be done, though the other ought not to be left undone." Luke, xi. 42.

OCTOBER THE THIRTY-FIRST.

ON THE MIRACLES.

John, x. 37.—*If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.*

IN appealing to his miracles as the evidences of his Divine authority, our Saviour acted with that sincerity which uniformly distinguished him throughout the whole course of his ministry. The stupendous deeds to which he referred were not wrought in a secret manner, and before select witnesses, or in remote corners and among an ignorant and credulous people, but in populous cities and places of public resort, amidst promiscuous assemblies; and at Jerusalem, where his enemies were both numerous and intelligent, sagacious and vigilant. When, therefore, our Lord rested his pretensions upon his mighty works, the Pharisees, who were always upon the watch to ruin his reputation, would gladly have seized the opportunity of refuting his claims, if they could have denied the reality of those wonders, or have rendered them suspicious by the charge of deception and collusion. That they made no other attempt to get rid of these facts than by ascribing them to magical influence, is not only a proof that the miracles were performed in the way described,

but that the most inveterate adversaries of Jesus were minutely acquainted with them. The wretched fallacy, however, which was devised to invalidate the testimony of these mighty deeds, was only intended to impose upon the multitude, like the artifice of the Egyptian king to counteract the miracles of Moses; for that the Pharisees did not believe their own story, is evident from the silence which they observed when challenged to make a strict examination of these works. It certainly was not for the want of an inclination to dishonour our Saviour that these bigots declined the proposal, but they were afraid lest the investigation should produce a general spirit of inquiry, by which truth would have been established and their malignity made manifest. There was also another cause for this apparent insensibility to the appeal which they heard, and that was an apprehension that the person who could perform such wonders as those which they had beheld, might display still more awful signs of power to his own glory and their confusion. These acute reasoners were aware that He who had accomplished so many acts of benevolence might, if he pleased, change the nature of his operations, and from works of mercy proceed to those of judgment. To this conclusion they were naturally led by what had just happened to themselves, when in the midst of their fury they were arrested by a controuling impulse, and prevented from executing that summary vengeance which the whole assembly had meditated against this extraordinary person. Alone and unarmed, surrounded by an enraged populace, who were provoked to madness by his high assumptions, stood Jesus, calm and collected, firm and undaunted, without making any effort to escape from his enemies or to allay their resentment; yet while their hands were uplifted ready to hurl destruction upon the object of their hate, they were suddenly palsied, unmoved, and rendered impotent.

These infuriated Jews were neither restrained from their purpose by authority, nor diverted from it by persuasion; but that Divine Power which they blasphemed stopped them instantaneously in their murderous design, and deprived them of all capacity, though not of the intention, to do mischief. Well then might our Lord say to these evil-minded people, who were neither to be mollified by kindness nor awakened by terror, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not."

As the several parts of the visible creation, whether in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, lead the serious mind up to that great First Cause, who made all things by his word and upholds them by his will; so the miracles which Jesus wrought indicated as clearly an absolute dominion over that vast system, which every man but an atheist will admire as the production of Infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness. None but that Being who formed the universe could give health without medicinal application, create the visual faculties where they never had before existed, invigorate the withered limb, or restore the dead body to life; these, therefore, were as much the works of God as those which we continually behold and acknowledge to be his, in the revolutions of the celestial orbs, the growth of plants, or the mechanism of the animal structure. Such, however, were a few only of the prodigious actions by which Jesus proved himself to be the Son of God, for he also manifested the high and incommunicable attributes of the Deity, by penetrating the recesses of the human intellect, exploring the latent thought, and discovering it, to the astonishment of the person by whom it was carefully harboured in the hidden chamber of his imagination. The "Wonderful One and the Counsellor," as he was emphatically termed many ages before his incarnation, unravelled the secrets of the human heart, and brought to light

the things of darkness which were anxiously concealed by those who devised them. With one miracle he disappointed the misguided multitude, who wanted to confer on him a crown by force ; and with another he disarmed the maddened people, who would have destroyed him for asserting his essential divinity. In this manner did he evince in every way his entire command over all the powers, both natural and moral ; saying in the silent, but energetic, language of Omnipotence, " Thus far shall ye go, and no further." On all accounts, then, the works of the Saviour were those of the eternal Father ; for they were the effects of an inherent virtue in Him who performed them, and the good of mankind was their exclusive object. Even those miracles which were of an awful cast and a judicial character, showed only what he was capable of doing ; and that the Person whom the obdurate Jews reviled and persecuted, could, if he had so pleased, have overturned their city by his word, and have buried that faithless generation in its ruins. But his power was only equalled by his love ; and as the Almighty bears long with the ingratitude and wickedness of the world, so our Lord patiently endured the contradiction of sinners, and suffered them to fill up the measure of their iniquities, till the overflowing mass of impiety accomplished that destruction which the Messiah had so exactly foretold. Let us then profit by this fearful example, in making a proper use of the light and grace which we enjoy ; for since the works of Jesus were wrought for our edification, as well as that of the persons who slighted them, heavy will be our judgment, if, in the face of the evidence of miracles and prophecies, we shall continue to " neglect so great salvation." Heb. ii. 3.

NOVEMBER THE FIRST.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Luke, xi. 1.—One of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

OF the several duties which constitute the Christian life, none is more strongly enforced in the Sacred Scriptures than prayer, as the appointed means of conveying light and strength to the soul, under all the difficulties and temptations to which it is exposed in this probationary state. Even if man had no dangers to encounter or errors to lament, his daily homage would be due to that gracious Being on whose will he depends for existence, and whose goodness provides him with all the comforts he enjoys. But when memory brings to view time wasted in frivolous pursuits, blessings abused in licentious indulgence, and talents either buried or misapplied; when the mind, on revolving the days that are past, considers how little has been done in the way of improvement, and how much in dissipation and folly, then will the necessity of prayer be obvious, even to him who, by neglecting the practice, knows not how to frame his words aright. Unspeakably great, therefore, are our obligations to the Divine Teacher, who has not only encouraged us to the frequent performance of this duty, by the promise of its being attended with a blessing, but who has also set us an example in his own regular conduct, and laid down an admirable model for our instruction. That our blessed Lord was much in the exercise of this holy duty, is evident from what is recorded of his punctual attendance on the public services of the sanctuary, and of the frequency of his own private devotions.

At one time we read of his spending nearly the whole of a tempestuous night in prayer, alone and on a mountain ; at another, that the disciples were present and heard his supplications, the fervour of which had such an effect upon one of them, that he said, " Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." It is not to be supposed from this request, that the attendants of Jesus were so unacquainted with this necessary part of religion as to have lived, like too many who call themselves Christians, in the neglect of a positive institution and a culpable disregard of the example which was continually before them. The Jewish people, with all their faults, were not so abandoned as to set at nought the forms of piety, and to live without the acknowledgement of God and his providence. They had their stated hours of prayer, which every person was expected to observe, whatever might be the defects of his life or the errors of his faith. The object, therefore, of the inquirer, in asking for directions how to pray, was to obtain either a new formulary of devotion, adapted to the public character of the disciples, or some specific rule by which they might be enabled at all times to frame their petitions in a manner suited to their circumstances and the state of the persons among whom they should be called to minister. The notion that some of the disciples were ignorant of the sermon on the mount, is void of all probability ; and it is equally absurd to suppose that so interesting a part of that discourse, as the one relating to prayer, should have been forgotten by any of them. From the present narrative it is evident that the person who made the inquiry did not consider that form as intended for public use ; in which notion he seems to have been confirmed by hearing Jesus pray with such uncommon fluency and spirituality, that he wished to possess the same eminent gift of utterance.

But our Saviour showed, in his answer, that the order which he had prescribed was intended to be a perpetual one, for social as well as private purposes. On this occasion he laid an emphatic stress upon the obligation of using it constantly in public worship; for in no other sense can we properly understand the injunction, "When ye pray, say," or audibly pronounce the words which I have before communicated for your individual benefit, and now direct you invariably to adopt in your ministerial capacity. This disciple wanted an enlarged gift, but his Master taught him the necessity of one rule for the good of the whole church; a form which all might understand, and by which of course all might be edified. There is nothing, in fact, which the believer can want for himself, or for which he should pray in conjunction with his brethren, but what may be comprehended under one or other of the clauses of this perfect directory. In the first place we are encouraged to come freely unto God as our Father, who is reconciled unto us in heaven, through the righteousness and mediation of his Son, by whom we obtain the adoption of children. That heaven is the economy of grace, whence all our blessings flow, and in which only our praises and supplications are sanctified and accepted. We pray, therefore, that the Divine name may be hallowed, or held in such holy estimation by ourselves and all men, as to dispel the works of darkness, and produce a general reformation of our hearts and lives. To the same purpose we entreat that the kingdom of God may come with power, in the destruction of error and superstition, the diffusion of Divine knowledge, and the universal practice of holiness. With the same view it is our earnest desire that the "will of God may be done in earth as it is in heaven," by becoming the principle of faith and the rule of action, in all those who are now in an unenlightened state, or the

children of this world, as it is in those who are born from above. But while we so pray in the spirit of love, for the extension of truth and virtue in all lands, we are reminded of that supply of grace, without which, whatever be our privileges and advantages, we cannot hope to pass through this troublesome and chequered course with safety. We therefore make it our request to be supplied with that spiritual food, which is even more necessary for the support of the soul than material aliment is for the body: and this supersubstantial bread, as the original terms it, we must seek daily from above as the Israelites did its type in the wilderness. But in thus praying for the aid of Divine grace, and the comforts of life proper for us, we are led to consider our abuse of former mercies, and to be humble before God on account of our manifold sins, the pardon of which we entreat with the sincerity evinced in our own forgiveness of those who have offended us, and for whose welfare, spiritual and temporal, we offer up our ardent supplications at the Throne of Grace. This sense of our past errors, and compassion for the weakness of others, will cause us to pray fervently that we may be kept in the hour of trial, and preserved from those dangerous temptations which will occasionally beset us in the course of our pilgrimage. Knowing, by experience, the insufficiency of human strength and resolution to guard against the delusions of the adversary, or to overcome them when they are assisted by our natural corruptions, we shall see the propriety of keeping this petition constantly in mind, as the best means of being secured from the assaults of the evil one, who never gives us any trouble, till we resist his devices, shake off his yoke, and strive in earnest to gain the victory over the world. Such is the importance of that prayer which our Lord hath given to his church as a standing form of worship, being

adapted to her circumstances in every age, during this her militant state, and to the condition of all her members, till they are called to the reward of their labours by their God and Saviour, to whom belongs "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen!"

NOVEMBER THE SECOND.

THE RICH SENSUALIST.

Luke, xii. 21.—*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

THIS is the conclusion of a parable which was related by our Saviour, on being asked to interpose his authority in a dispute between two brothers, respecting the division of a paternal estate. It is not said which of these persons was most in fault; but as both seem to have been present when the admonition against covetousness was delivered, it is probable that the contention, as is usual on such occasions, had been carried to excess on each side; the one holding his possession tenaciously on the ground of right, and the other thinking himself to have been hardly dealt with in the distribution of the property. But if the elder brother was sordid, the younger was envious; so that, had their conditions been reversed, the very same scene of avarice on the one hand, and discontent on the other, would in all likelihood have occurred. That there was, however, nothing in the circumstances of the complainant to call for pity, is evident from the asperity with which his request was treated; but that there was also much to be blamed in the conduct of his opponent, is equally manifest from the parable, in which the extreme folly and wickedness of a rapacious disposition is strongly de-

lineated. "The ground of a certain rich man," says our Lord, "brought forth plentifully;" but instead of lifting up his heart in thankfulness to the Author of every good and perfect gift, or showing his liberality towards the poor and needy, this wealthy man began to consider what he should do with his vast acquisitions. The increase of his stock was an addition to his cares; and, as God was not in his thoughts, he became troubled about the security of his goods. "What shall I do," said he to himself, "because I have not room where to lay my fruits?"

At that time there were many industrious men in Judea, upon whom the hand of affliction had pressed so heavily, that they knew not where to get provisions for their families; yet, unmindful of their distress and of the sorrows of the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless, this careful person could not find in his heart to appropriate any portion of his abundance to the relief of the miserable. But what better could be expected of one who would not even trust Providence for the preservation of present blessings, or the supply of future wants? "This will I do," resolved the careful man; "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." Here was a display of worldly prudence; and some, no doubt, would be disposed to commend the judgment of this person, who took such pains to husband the produce of a fertile season against the time of scarcity and adversity. But if the barns of this rich man had hitherto proved capacious enough for his necessities, this determination to hoard up the superfluity was a plain evidence of an unbelieving and hardened mind. Yet such is too often the case with those who set their affections intently upon the things of this world. These people are always thoughtful and uneasy while engaged in the pursuit of their darling object; but when their efforts are crowned with success,

anxiety follows about the safety of what they have acquired, and the best mode of increasing it advantageously for their own satisfaction, and the benefit of those who will come after them. The man in the parable, however, had no concern for any one but himself, and his sole design in building new storehouses was to have an ample supply of luxuries always at his command. He had no higher ideas of the blessings of Heaven than the beasts that perish; and all his notions of living were centered in the pleasures of sense, saying, "Soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Nothing could more forcibly express the infatuation of riches than the repetition of the address, while the grovelling propensity of the carnal mind is no less strongly painted in the nature of the enjoyments which this covetous sensualist anticipated for many years, as he surveyed his great possessions. Such characters are far from being uncommon, even in the most civilized countries; and while they appear to exist for no other purpose than the indulgence of their appetite, they flatter themselves with being at least harmless, if not useful in their generation. Like the rich man here described, they imagine that the goods which they derive from the Divine beneficence, are the fruits of their own industry, and may therefore be fitly applied to the purposes of ease and pleasure. That they are only stewards of God's bounty, forms no part of their consideration; and, indeed, so far is the greedy miser, or the extravagant spendthrift, from thinking hoarding or dissipation to be sinful, the one prides himself on the wisdom of his management, and the other takes immeasurable credit for the extent of his liberality. But the end of such persons, without repentance, will differ little from that of the sensualist, who heaped up riches for no other object than that of pampering his appetite, and living many

years in unprofitable luxury and idleness. In the midst of his schemes to pull down and build up, that he might enjoy a long course of vain delight, he heard the warning voice, "Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" The application which our Lord made of this parable is of universal concern, and affects all persons who neglect the improvement of their minds and the salvation of their souls, for the perishing things of time and sense; "so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." But, as in all these figurative representations, there is yet another meaning couched under the description of this selfish character, who was an expressive allegory of the Jewish nation, upon whom the blessings of grace had been showered in rich abundance for many ages. Instead, however, of making a due use of the revelation which they enjoyed, and extending the knowledge of it to their neighbours, this people became proud and uncharitable, bigoted and sensual. When the fullness of time came for the diffusion of righteousness over all the earth, they were substituting human traditions for the word of God, and thinking of nothing but their own temporal ease and aggrandizement. They placed all religion in superstitious observances, and confined those promises which belonged to the whole human family, exclusively to their particular polity, being unwilling to allow that the poor outcast Gentiles should enjoy any part of the Divine favour in the mystery of redemption. But while they were thus intent upon the perpetuity of their state, neglecting the life of faith for carnal ordinances, the Word of God came, and not only put an end to their dreams of an earthly monarchy, but deprived them of the privileges which they had so wantonly abused. From their history, then, and the parable, which is an apt illustration of it, let us learn

to moderate our desires, to be diligent in our calling, and to sanctify the mercies which we have received to the advancement of the Divine glory, and the benefit of our fellow-creatures; or, in the language of the Apostle, "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Rom. xii. 2.

NOVEMBER THE THIRD.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Luke, xv. 32.—*It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

THE parables of our Saviour are full of practical instruction, while they convey the most important information concerning the nature of the divine life and the mystery of redemption. This union of preceptive and doctrinal wisdom is happily exhibited in the narrative of the wandering prodigal, who, after a life of folly, returns to his paternal habitation, and is welcomed with joy. "A certain man," says our Lord, "had two-sons;" and these youths were of opposite characters, the eldest being of a close, reserved, and domestic turn; the younger of an open, gay, and enterprizing disposition. This last, on attaining maturity, became impatient of restraint and dissatisfied with his father's house. He therefore solicited and received the portion to which he conceived himself entitled, thinking that he was capable of managing his own affairs, and fancying that in an independent state he should enjoy much pleasure of which he was now unreasonably debarred. It is observable, however, of this youth, that he did not,

on obtaining his fortune, depart immediately from the place of his birth, which was a proof that his heart was uncontaminated, and that his education had not been neglected. But the desire of seeing the world, and a strong confidence in his own powers, induced him after some days to leave his father's house, and take a journey into a far country. Here evil company and numerous temptations soon overcame his resolutions, and he fell from one degree of vice to another, till the habits of licentiousness so corrupted his principles, that he wasted his patrimony in riotous living. To complete his wretchedness, a famine arose; and as none of his former companions took pity on his misery, he was obliged to engage in the most servile of all employments; for not having acquired the knowledge of any occupation in the season of prosperity, and being unaccustomed to labour, the only business which he could undertake was that of keeping swine. This, however, was a situation fitted to one whose life had hitherto so nearly resembled the grovelling nature of the herd with which he was compelled to associate. But he was yet to endure still greater hardship before his eyes could be opened to a sense of his folly; for when the famine raged sore, no person thought of contributing any thing to the support of one who was probably considered as a useless member of society. In this woeful condition, abandoned, as all of this description invariably are, by those who enjoyed their profuseness, the prodigal was constrained to allay his craving appetite with the husks which the swine did eat. His affliction was great, but it was merciful and necessary, being intended to awaken in him a consciousness of his error; and accordingly, when he was reduced to the extremity of want, he began to reflect for the first time on the comforts which prevailed in his father's house, where the lowest servant had enough and to spare. The com-

parison of their happiness with his own deplorable but merited misery, filled the mind of the wanderer with sorrow for his manifold offences; and pride being thus completely mortified in him, he determined to cast himself upon the known goodness of his parent; "I will arise," said he, "and will go to my father; and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants." Where repentance is deeply laid, resolution is quickly carried into action. This sincere penitent did not sit still amidst the filthiness of his situation, pondering the reception which he was likely to experience, and ashamed to appear in such a disgusting state before those who had witnessed his former splendour. But he arose, and proceeded with trembling steps towards his native home; and while he was yet afar off, his father seeing him coming, waited not for his approach, but, pitying his altered state, hastened forth and embraced him with fond affection. Such, indeed, was the goodness of this venerable man, that when his repentant son began to express his sorrow at having given him offence, and to urge his humble petition, he turned from the subject, and ordered the servants to bring out proper garments for his recovered child, and to provide an entertainment suitable to the joyful occasion. All this passed in the absence of the elder son, who was greatly surprized; on his return home, to hear the sound of minstrelsy and dancing; but his astonishment was quickly converted into envy, when he was informed of the cause of this uncommon mirth, in which he was resolved not to be a sharer, and therefore refused to enter the house. This discontent being reported to the father, gave him so much concern, that he went out to remonstrate with him upon his unreasonable jealousy, and to assure him that this joyful restoration should be

no detriment to his circumstances; but said the good man, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Such is the parable which presents to our view the gracious and long suffering Father of Spirits, whose two sons are the respective branches of his family upon earth, commonly denominated the Jew and the Gentile. Originally they both had the same habitation, or lived in the communion of the church, which is "the house of the living God;" but at an early period the younger son went out with the knowledge and institutions that he had acquired, and set up a religion for himself in a distant country, where he soon lost all his sound principles, amidst the corruptions of idolatry. At length having dissipated that Divine truth which was given to him for his support, he "became destitute of hope, and literally lived without God in the world." No wonder, then, that in such a state of apostasy there should be a famine of the word of life; for in vain could the pageantry of superstition, though aided by the speculations of philosophy, offer any consolation to the afflicted mind, or guide it in the way of righteousness by the promise of an eternal reward. Compelled to feed on the empty husks of human devices and conjectural systems, the heathen world wandered long in quest of truth, but found it not, till the fullness of time came, when many arose at the sound of salvation, and were welcomed home with joy and minstrelsy in their Father's house. But this gave great offence to the self-righteous Jew, who could not endure that aliens and outcasts from the commonwealth of Israel should live and worship under the same roof with him who, according to his own account, had "served God many years, and never transgressed his commandments." That the fatted calf, or the great sacrifice, should be slain

and offered for the benefit of the Gentiles, proved a dreadful shock to the narrow prejudices and selfish ideas of this highly favoured but uncharitable people. When, therefore, the feast of reconciliation took place, and all was melody and mirth in the church, the Jews, like the elder son, refused to join in the solemn festivities, though the Eternal Father by a voice from heaven, and by his miraculous works, entreated them to come in. Here, then, we may perceive the peculiar propriety of this pathetic parable, as a representation of the Divine economy in the redemption of mankind; and from it the greatest offenders may derive encouragement to turn unto God, knowing that they who come to him with contrite hearts he will in no wise cast out. So far, indeed, from rejecting any such characters on account of their long absence and numerous transgressions, he will receive them graciously and love them freely, while their conversion shall produce gladness in the church below, and songs of praise in the courts above; for "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."

NOVEMBER THE FOURTH.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

Luke, xvi. 8.—*And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*

By considering the parables as wholly moral the greatest part of their beauty is lost, and some of these divine representations are rendered dark and inexplicable for want of ascertaining their proper

scope and intention. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the account of the extravagant or unjust steward, who had wasted his lord's property, and on being about to be dismissed from his situation contrived an artful, but fraudulent, scheme for his future support. This man was accused of having squandered the goods with which he was entrusted, but he had made no provision for himself. His primary fault, therefore, was idleness, which is the source of all evils, and, by weakening the principles of virtuous action, frequently leads men to the commission of enormous offences. The steward knowing that his accounts were in a most disordered condition, and that he could not hope to be reinstated in his master's service, began to reflect upon his wretched case, and to consider what course he should pursue to gain a livelihood. Here the former folly of the man was strikingly displayed in his own confession, that there was nothing to which he could turn his mind, and no employment for which he was fitted by his knowledge and habits. Luxury and indolence had even enervated his bodily powers, so that he could not dig the ground to earn a morsel of bread; and as pride is inseparable from idleness, he was ashamed to ask the assistance of others. In this exigency he devised the sagacious project of laying all his lord's tenants under the perpetual obligation of maintaining him, by making such alterations in their leases as to reduce the rents far below the original agreement and real value. Thus all these men became dependant on his will, and were compelled to take care of one whom they despised, for their own sakes, and to prevent a discovery of the fraud which had been committed. But though the scheme was well laid and artfully managed by the steward, it could not escape the knowledge of his lord; who being astonished at this proof of his skill and foresight, expressed with great magnanimity an admiration of his wisdom. With

this commendation of the steward's policy, by his master, the parable is closed, and from it our Saviour has deduced this general lesson for his followers, that they should take as much pains to provide for eternity, by enriching their minds, as this man did to secure himself earthly friends and a refuge in the day of distress. But our Lord does not here set the conduct of a dishonest profligate before us for our imitation, nor does he advise us to make the attainment of wealth an object of our care. The real design of the parable, and the meaning of the application, will appear plain, if in the steward we behold the Jew, who abused the dispensation over which he presided, and in his state of degradation taking shelter in the habitations of the Gentiles, among whom, in a religious sense, he neither digs nor begs, being too indolent to search his own Scriptures for the word of life, and too proud to embrace the faith of others. Despised by all nations, he has yet experienced a reception among them, and through the long suffering of God, for gracious purposes, the seed of Israel still continue to preserve a distinct character over all the earth. While the Jewish people have been immersed in sensuality and unbelief, they have materially contributed to the information of others; and though they have basely limited the sense, and endeavoured to depreciate the value, of the Sacred Oracles of which they had the charge, they have unwittingly been the means of making the Divine promises known and understood wherever they reside.

Such being the predictive allegory contained in this parable, it teaches the children of the light, who enjoy the brightness of the Gospel-day, to be grateful for the mercy which has been granted them, and to profit by the example that has been made of those who wasted God's gifts in the season of their probation. It becomes us, therefore, to apply with dili-

gence to the business of religion, knowing that a day of reckoning will come, when we also must render an account of our stewardship. At that awful period heavy indeed will be our condemnation if it shall be found that we have abused the unsearchable riches of redemption, by neglecting the improvement of our own minds, or paying no regard to the moral and spiritual condition of others. But, on the other hand, great will be the reward and unspeakable the joy of him who has carefully studied the will of God in all things, and who in a spirit of fervent love has endeavoured to turn many unto righteousness by the purity of his faith and the exemplary tenour of his life and conversation. To every such sincere disciple, however lowly may be his condition and limited his abilities, is this promise given, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee in the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." Rev. iii. 10.

NOVEMBER THE FIFTH.

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR.

Luke, xvi. 19, 20.—*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.*

THE parabolical characters, descriptions, and language, were all adapted to the Jewish manners, opinions, and circumstances. Though, therefore, the people who heard these figurative discourses were ignorant of the general scope and intention of them, they saw enough in the allegorical repre-

sentations to reproach them for their sordid tempers, corrupt notions, and evil practices. They might have perceived also, if pride and prejudice had not completely blinded their understandings, that some prodigious and fearful change was about to take place in their civil and religious state, on account of the national impiety. A strong picture of their character and of the approaching revolution, was drawn by our Lord in the parable of the rich man, who led a constant round of luxurious idleness and extravagance, being as indifferent to the welfare of his own brethren, as to the wants of his fellow-creatures. The observations with which this awful description is introduced, clearly point out its predictive nature, and plainly show that it completes the design which was opened in the account of the unfaithful steward. "The law and the prophets," saith our Lord, "were in full force untill John," on whose appearance, as the harbinger of day, the typical institutions began to fade away, and the promises of the Messiah to be fulfilled. "Since that time," continues the Saviour, "the kingdom of God is preached; and every man, without any distinction of birth or profession, presseth into it." The meaning is not, that all to whom the Gospel came did actually comply with the overture, for the contrary was obvious in the infidelity of the very persons who heard this discourse; but the expression of every man, like that of every creature, denotes the universality of redemption and the end of all distinctions between the Jew and the Gentile. But though the Mosaic ritual was to terminate, and all men were to be united in one spiritual community under Him who is the head of his church, yet the moral law was rather to receive an enlarged sanction, than to suffer any diminution, by the manifestation of the Sun of righteousness. So great, however, was the degeneracy of the Jewish nation at this time, that more regard was paid to the

outward ordinances and the ceremonial part of religion, than to the eternal principles of truth or the practice of holiness. This gross corruption is termed here, and in other places, spiritual adultery, because the people who had been united to God by a special covenant, were guilty of substituting human traditions for the Divine commandments. Instead of preserving the faith inviolate, they defiled it by frivolous inventions, sensual indulgences, and the limitation of the promises to secular objects. Such was the state of things when the Redeemer announced the speedy dissolution of that polity, and the utter loss of those privileges, which the seed of Abraham had so greatly abused. In the parable of the steward the general character of this people is drawn, and the consequences of their expulsion from the rank of nations is plainly indicated. In that which follows, our Lord enters more minutely into the nature of their offence, the fate which awaited them, and the adoption of the despised Gentiles into that state which they had forfeited. The "certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day," is a figure of the Israelite, surrounded with the blessings of revelation, and in the full enjoyment of a splendid system communicated by God himself. The magnificent dress was symbolical of the Levitical service in all its grandeur; and the profusion of dainties which daily covered the table of the wealthy man, most aptly illustrated the Divine truths contained in the Sacred Oracles, and especially the promise of redemption, which was shadowed in every part of the temple service, and set forth under a variety of forms in the writings of the prophets. But if the high distinction of the Jew was strongly exhibited in the condition of this man, who lived at his ease in oriental sloth; the miserable being at his gate was equally as exact an emblem of human nature, in

general, and of the polluted gentile world in particular. This deplorable object could not be more pitiable and disagreeable on account of his ulcerated state, than the mass of mankind were by sin and superstition. Yet is it said that Lazarus was daily placed before the portal of the superb mansion, which abounded with all that could minister to pride and gratify the appetite. That such a woeful spectacle should be placed in that conspicuous situation may seem an unaccountable incident even in a parable. But when we consider what a length of time the Jews enjoyed their amazing privileges, during which space they never took any pity on their wretched neighbours, this part of the narrative will appear most appropriate and characteristic. We are told that the unhappy mendicant, who lay in that exposed state from day to day, "wished only to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table;" but it is not said that he received even this scanty pittance; though, if he did, he owed no thanks to the lordly sensualist, whose offal he casually partook perhaps with the dogs of the household. Here also we have a significant representation of what occurred in the connexion between the Gentiles and the Jews; for while the latter made a sluggish use of the treasures which they possessed, it was not in their power to hinder those who were seeking after knowledge from gaining some information concerning the mystery of redemption that was about to be revealed. In the fulness of time the beggar died, and his misery was completely at an end; for "the angels, or the messengers of Divine Truth, carried him into Abraham's bosom." This is the commencement of the prophetic part of the parable, for all that goes before is descriptive of the state of mankind at the Messiah's coming; but in that great event his ministers went forth with a Divine commission, and the poor heathen became, under the power of the

word, a joyful member of the kingdom of God. The believing Gentiles are now the children of Abraham, because, like the father of the faithful, they have cheerfully renounced all idolatry, and have received the word of life, though it called them to the sacrifice of every earthly relation and enjoyment. Abraham's bosom is a Hebrew phrase for the paradisaical state, and in this place it is happily descriptive of the church, whose members live by faith, as the patriarch did in his eventful pilgrimage, "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Heb. xi. 16. After the calling of the Gentiles into the bosom of that communion which Christ purchased with his blood, the Jewish economy experienced its predicted dissolution, and, like the rich man, obtained a magnificent funeral; for being of the earth, or having only a temporal designation, it was buried with all its grandeur, presenting an awful scene, even to the mighty conqueror, who was the appointed minister of the Divine judgments. But though the legal dispensation had an end, and is for ever mouldered into dust, the seed of Jacob continue as a standing monument of the Divine power and of the truth of prophecy. Ever since the destruction of Jerusalem the chosen family, "to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service, and the promises," have been deprived of political life, and remain afar off, without a mediator and destitute of an atonement. In this their exiled state, they see the Gentiles whom they despised in possession of the unsearchable riches which they wasted, and enjoying the fulness of that declaration which was made to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen. xxii. 18.

NOVEMBER THE SIXTH.

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR.

Luke, xvi. 31.—*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

THOUGH in this parable some regard was paid to the popular belief of the Jewish nation concerning the state of the soul after death, yet as our Divine Teacher never countenanced any erroneous opinions, the description which he has here given of the invisible world is more than an allegorical representation. In every piece of this kind the scenery and incidents are drawn from real objects, and occurrences that have an actual existence. The narrative, indeed, is not a genuine history, but the characters are taken from human nature; and the situations in which they are placed, both in this life and the next, are such as will most certainly be the respective lots of the righteous and the wicked. It is evident, therefore, that the disembodied soul is sensible of its own being, that it is capable of enjoying happiness or feeling pain, of holding an intercourse with others, and of reflecting upon its former condition with satisfaction or remorse. Such is the view which our Lord has given of the separate state of human spirits; from whence it appears, that the soul has no necessary dependence upon the corporeal frame for its perceptive faculties, and that, consequently, it does not sink with the body into an absolute insensibility, when the mortal stroke dissolves their union. In this parable the extinction of the legal system, and the subsistence of, the persons who abused it, are represented by the familiar yet awful object of the cessation of the vital functions, while the animating

principle, the conscious inhabitant, departs to lament the neglect of innumerable mercies, and the prostitution of its high privileges. When the rich voluptuary died, and was buried, the whole of him did not fall into an unconscious and dormant state, but immediately his eyes were lifted up to a full discernment of the dreadful change which had taken place in the manner of his being. Here his misery was heightened by knowing that the poor, wretched, and houseless creature, who had been wickedly suffered to perish at his gate, was now in the possession of honour, ease, and immortality. Now though this be an exact picture of the Jew, in the loss of his inheritance, which has been conferred on the Gentile, yet is the description no less true of those who, like the rich man, having placed all their happiness in the enjoyment of this world, sustain an eternal loss in the next; while the poor in spirit and lowly in heart, who were despised and persecuted here, shall then be admitted into the bosom of tranquillity and bliss. On lifting up his eyes in Hades, the torment which he felt made the proud man humble, so far at least as to entreat the smallest degree of relief and comfort from the finger of that very Lazarus whose whole person was at one time obnoxious to the delicate sense of this penitential suppliant. But he who could lately spurn the afflicted being that was laid at his gate, would now gladly receive from the finger of that defiled object a drop of water to allay his burning thirst. Such is the dire reverse of things in the future state, where the haughty despot becomes the prey of bitter anguish, and would give worlds, if he had them at his command, to exchange conditions with the meanest and most despised of his former vassals. But here also we may perceive the alteration that has taken place in the situations of the two characters or divisions of mankind, who were the prin-

cipal objects of the parable. The high-minded Jew, who would have no dealings with the Samaritans, and who said indeed to every other member of the human family, "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou;" is become, since the dissolution of his political state, an abject dependent upon the will of those whom once he contemned and vilified. Nay, more than this, he seeks for support in his misery from the Gentiles; and whatever hope he may have of a restoration, it is in their assistance. Still there is no union between them, no acknowledged alliance; and though there are many instances of the conversion of Jews, which we trust will in time be followed by their complete redemption, yet Judaism itself gains no proselytes; not have the people who adhered to that persuasion made any advance in moral and intellectual improvement, while the very Scriptures which they still profess to believe are to them no better than a sealed book. Thus are they in a state of spiritual darkness; and as they neither receive nor impart knowledge, it may be truly said of them, that they are severed from the rest of mankind by an impassable gulph. This, however, is properly to be understood of their separation from the communion of saints, to which they cannot have access so long as they continue to reject the crucified and risen Saviour. Their unbelief is the unfathomable chasm, and till this be removed they can never be united to the spiritual seed of Abraham. But the obduracy of their infidelity is forcibly expressed and clearly predicted in the reply of the patriarch to the request, that a messenger from the world of spirits might be sent to warn this people of their danger, and to bring them to a sense of their duty; "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." What was here affirmed, that generation saw verified; for neither the accumulated

evidence of miracle and prophecy could open the eyes of the people in the day of their visitation; nor would they even acknowledge that Mighty One to be their Messiah, in whom Abraham believed, even when he arose by his own divine power from the dead. Such is the primary application of this prophetic parable, from which we learn the danger of neglecting the means of grace in the period assigned us for our probation; and the sin of prostituting those gifts which have been bestowed upon us for the improvement of ourselves and the benefit of others. To all, then, whether rich or poor, this awful description speaks with solemn energy; warning them to be faithful and diligent in their respective callings; enjoining the one to be humble, pious, and charitable; and the other, to be contented and devout, sober and industrious; remembering, that "now is the accepted time, and that now in this life only is the day of salvation." 2 Cor. vi. 2.

NOVEMBER THE SEVENTH.

THE TEN LEPERS.

Luke, xvii. 18.—There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

As the blessings of Providence descend upon the just and the unjust, so the Sun of righteousness, in his progress upon earth, did not confine his benefits to those persons whose moral qualities might seem to render them peculiarly deserving of his benevolence. He well knew the characters of those whom he relieved, and he could tell what use they would make of his favours; but this did not abate his benignity, nor hinder him from extending his goodness even to the unthankful. Our Lord never turned a deaf ear.

to the supplicating voice of the afflicted ; and though he was aware that some of the persons who sought his powerful assistance were far from being sincere when they appeared before him with much apparent humility and devotion, he yet attended mildly to their petitions, compassionated their sorrows, and readily administered the desired relief. A striking instance of the Divine condescension and human ingratitude happened when Jesus was passing the high road which led through Samaria, from Galilee to Judea, where he was accosted by ten unhappy persons, who were cut off from the enjoyments of society by that dreadful malady, the leprosy. There are some kinds of evils which unite men of the most discordant minds ; so that, whatever may have been their former enmity, they are glad to herd together, that they may find some suspension of their misery and a refuge from the neglect of the world. Thus nine of these lepers, who were Jews, with all the bigotry and insensibility of their nation, readily admitted into their company a poor Samaritan, who was in the same wretched condition with themselves. But the disorder with which they were now visited had reduced them all to a level ; and though it certainly did not change their disposition, it so far restrained the austerity of the Jews, that they were glad to associate with one who, in that part of the country, was enabled to render them some assistance. On being expelled from the community to which they belonged, these men sought a retreat among strangers, with whom, but for this woeful necessity, they would have had no dealings ; and such is the humiliating nature of affliction, that the proud and haughty scorner frequently submits to court the acquaintance and advice of the very person whom he has despised and injured in the day of his prosperity. The Samaritans might have driven these leprous Jews out of their district, as their own countrymen had already done ; but to

the honour of those people, it appears that they pitied the misfortune of the exiles, and administered to their wants. This benevolence ought to have softened the tempers and enlarged the sentiments of the unhappy wanderers; instead of which, the loathsome disease which defiled their bodies was but a faint representation of that foul corruption which polluted their souls. When our Saviour approached the spot where these outcasts were collected, they all lifted up their voices in loud supplications for help, addressing him with reverence and acknowledging his power. But when, agreeable to his injunction, they went to present themselves before the priests, and by the way experienced the cure that had been wrought in their persons, the Jews, without thinking any thing more of their benefactor, hastened home to enjoy the gratulations of their friends; while the poor Samaritan, overwhelmed with admiration, glorified God aloud, and returned immediately to seek Jesus, before whom he fell prostrate, and gave him thanks. The faith and gratitude of this stranger obtained the Divine commendation, and a still greater blessing was imparted unto him in the healing virtue of that grace by which he was made whole; not merely in the perfect cleansing of his body, but in the renovation of his mind. The Jews, on the contrary, had another leprosy adhering to them, and for their malignant infidelity they suffered a heavier judgment than that from which they were miraculously delivered. And yet in the base behaviour of these ungrateful men we may discern much of our own spirit and conduct in the unworthy return which we have made for the numerous instances of providential goodness that we have experienced during the course of our lives. In the hour of distress, indeed, we were ready to pray with great fervour, and to make many promises of constant gratitude and obedience to the Almighty, if he would but rescue us

from trouble or restore us to health ; but when sorrow has been converted into joy, the remembrance of our affliction and the strength of our resolutions have faded away together. Too many, on being raised from the bed of sickness, instead of glorifying the God of their mercies by the purity of their conversation and the influence of their example, are eager to rejoin their gay associates, and to mingle in the follies and pleasures of the world. At the very best, they are satisfied with expressing their thankfulness in formal terms, and then set out in the pursuit of the world with as much intenseness of application as if it was to be their residence for ever. Whatever sentiments of penitence and piety these persons felt in the season of serious reflection, are now entirely obliterated ; and so far are they from seeking the Redeemer with sincerity of heart, and an earnest desire to live and die in his service, the very thought of religion renders them uneasy, they want something to dispel care ; and thus, as “ the sow that was washed hastens to wallow in the mire,” the “ last end of such men is worse than the first.” 2 Pet. ii. 22. Luke, xi. 26.

NOVEMBER THE EIGHTH.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.

John, xi. 35.—*Jesus wept.*

IT has been rashly affirmed, that the virtue of friendship forms no part of the Christian ethics ; and some have endeavoured, with worse than savage ferocity, to banish the principle altogether from the system of morality. The two opinions, though maintained by persons of different characters, and with opposite intentions, unite in the same point, and are as inju-

rious to the comforts of man as they are repugnant to reason and derogatory to religion. In the history before us we have an ample confutation of this conjunct error, and a full proof that the social affections are not only interwoven in our nature, but that they constitute a great branch of our duty and privilege, as the members of one family and the heirs of the same promise. Of the great Exemplar of all perfection it is recorded, that he not only possessed the tender passions in an exquisite degree, but that he expressed his feelings in the presence of his enemies as well as of his followers; of those who by study had learnt to be indifferent to all interests but their own, and those who were unacquainted with the art of resisting the claims of humanity. Our blessed Lord had among his disciples one whom he particularly esteemed, and who enjoyed much of his confidence; he had also an intimate acquaintance at Bethany, with whose family he occasionally resided, and of the several members of which it is said, that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." During the abode of our Saviour in the country beyond Jordan, a messenger was sent to inform him that his friend lay dangerously ill, and the language in which the intelligence was conveyed showed the regard in which Lazarus was held, and the confidence reposed by his sisters in the power and goodness of Jesus; "Lord," said they with pathetic simplicity, "he whom thou lovest is sick." Nothing more they imagined was necessary to hasten the coming of Him, upon whose kindness they depended in this afflicting visitation; for to his miracles they were no strangers, and of his willingness to relieve they had no doubt. They knew that no one had ever sought his assistance in vain, that he sent no suitor from his presence with a sorrowing heart; but that, on the contrary, he was ever ready to meet their wishes, to cheer their desponding

minds, and, agreeable to what had been foretold of him, "to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." *Ia. lxi. 3.* From the experience which this pious family had of the readiness of Jesus to relieve the distressed, they had every reason to believe that the information which was sent would either bring him quickly in person, or produce a favourable change in the disorder of Lazarus. But the ways of Divine Wisdom are inscrutable, and our Saviour on this occasion gave us an instructive lesson, teaching us to suspend our judgment in the midst of every dark trial, and to submit ourselves to the direction of Him who ordereth all things well. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he abode therefore two days in the place where he was. This was a period of heightened anxiety, filled with alternate fears and hopes, alarm and expectation, to the sisters, who knew that their message had been delivered, and that the Lord was actually on the road towards Bethany. But one day after another elapsed, and Jesus neither appeared himself, nor sent any of his disciples, to comfort the mourners and to apprize them of his approach. In this interval the affectionate women watched with keen solicitude the progress of their brother's malady, every moment expecting some symptom of returning health; and when they found none, with trembling desire they looked abroad for the appearance of that gracious Person whose presence itself was life. But as their faith was destined to undergo its utmost trial, their desires were disappointed, the vital stream ebbed fast, the pallid face of the sick assumed the signs of speedy mortality, the hand of death was upon Lazarus, and He who alone could arrest the fatal stroke was far away. So long, however, as the pulse continued to beat, and respiration was perceptible, the faithful attendants considered life as secure in the

expectation of His coming who had it in his power to heal the most desperate disease, and to suspend the flight of the departing spirit. But when all was over, and the eyelids of Lazarus were closed, hope departed, and the two sisters sat down together to lament their loss, and to learn the hard lesson of resignation to the Divine will. On the fourth day after the interment the news came that Jesus drew near to Bethany; but what consolation could this intelligence yield to those who had buried their principal earthly comfort in the grave? Such a report was only calculated to renew their griefs and to open fresh matter of lamentation, by reflecting, that had this gracious visitant come some days earlier, the house of mourning might have been the seat of joy. But when Martha was told that Jesus was arrived, instead of betraying resentment, or sitting in gloomy silence, she arose and went forth to meet him. At this interview her language was sorrowful but submissive, plaintive but devout; "Lord," said she, "if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Martha knew that our Saviour could have prevented the sad catastrophe; but that the departed spirit might be recalled back to its former mansion, which was now in a state of putrefaction, exceeded her comprehension. A ray of hope, however, was kindled by the appearance of one whose benignity was equal to his power; and though she could not venture to ask for so mighty a blessing as that of the restoration of her brother, she comforted herself with the assurance, that this visit was intended for good; "I know," she added, "that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, he will give it thee." Such was the faith of this extraordinary woman, and yet it was defective, as it did not amount to a full persuasion that Jesus possessed in himself the absolute disposal of life and of death. To convince her that he had all power, both in heaven and upon earth,

he replied, "Thy brother shall rise again;" and when Martha professed her belief in the revival of the dead at the last day, our Lord told her that on him alone did that event depend; and he went still farther than this, by assuring her that all who were united to him should obtain even here the principle of immortality. Though Martha had no clear conception of our Lord's meaning, nor any prospect of his design, she relied upon his gracious word, because she was convinced of his Divine authority, which she openly confessed; "Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." The piety of Mary did not fall short of that of her sister; and on being informed that the Master was come, she quitted the house, and ran to pour out the sorrows of her heart at his feet. This touching scene sensibly affected the Jews who came to condole with the distressed women in their affliction; and when our Lord perceived their sympathy, "he groaned in spirit and was troubled." To the inquiry where the body lay, these persons answered, "Come and see;" and as the company turned to satisfy what they supposed to be only a tender curiosity to behold the spot where the remains of Lazarus were deposited, Jesus wept. It is reasonable to suppose that this sensibility was excited by the contrast exhibited in the resignation of the two sisters, and the infidelity of the surrounding populace; the former being strong in faith amidst the severest trial, while many of the spectators were so hardened in impenitence as not to be persuaded though one should rise from the dead. Yet even for these persons did our Lord pray that they might be awakened from their supineness, and be convinced of their danger, before the day of grace should set upon them for ever. But such was their obduracy, that neither his tears nor prayers could soften their hearts; and when they beheld the dead man come forth from the

grave at his command, they went their way to "tell the Pharisees what things Jesus had done." Well, then might our Lord weep when he knew that even this stupendous miracle would fail to save the devoted nation from ruin; and that, so far from producing a spirit of serious inquiry and repentance among the people, it would be the means of accelerating his crucifixion and their utter excision. "Then from that day forth the Pharisees took counsel together to put him to death;" and so great was the malignity of these men, that though they affected at first to be moved by compassion to the afflicted mourners, this miracle turned their sympathy into hatred, and they plotted the death of Lazarus also; from whence we may perceive that there is no real friendship but that which has religion for its basis. "Take heed therefore, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Heb. xii. 12, 13.

NOVEMBER THE NINTH.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

Luke, xviii. 14.—*Every one that exulteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

As in the common business of life the worthless and the ignorant always make the loudest pretensions to integrity and ability, so it too often happens in the most important of all concerns, that while the excellent of the earth pass along either unnoticed or despised, the noisy professor and the pompous deceiver

attract public admiration, and succeed in imposing upon mankind. This was the case at the time when the Gospel was first preached; and it is to be feared that the same evil has continued to prevail in a greater or less degree among those who affect to consider the pride and bigotry of the Pharisees with equal surprize and abhorrence. It seems, that among our Lord's followers there were not wanting some who had profited so little by his precepts and example, as to "trust in themselves that they were righteous, and to despise others." To correct their vanity and reprove their uncharitableness, this parable was related, in which the nature of true repentance is contrasted with that semblance of religion by which men sometimes cheat each other, and even delude their own souls; but which will only serve to aggravate their guilt and increase their condemnation at the great day of account, when every one shall be judged according to his works. Two men went up to the temple at the same time to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a Publican; whose characters were completely opposed to each other; for while the one was much involved in worldly affairs, as a collector of the imperial tribute, the other appeared to be voluntarily raised above all earthly concerns, and to have nothing so much at heart as the improvement of his own mind and the edification of his neighbours. From their respective professions it was natural to have expected humility in the Pharisee and arrogance in the Publican; and that while the last made a virtue of his usefulness and integrity, the other would have prostrated himself before the Throne of Mercy, imploring the forgiveness of his failings, and praying for the conversion of his erring brethren. The reverse of all this was the case; for the Pharisee entered the sanctuary with an air of importance, as if he claimed a reward for meritorious services; and the Publican stood afar off, as

overpowered with a sense of his sins, and an apprehension of the Divine Majesty, that he would not even raise his eyes towards heaven. The language of these men corresponded with the difference of their behaviour; for the professor of extraordinary sanctity having no pardon to ask nor grace to solicit, confined the whole of his address to those qualities which set him, in his own estimation, above the rest of the world. That he was neither an extortioner, an unjust person, nor an adulterer, was certainly proper matter for thankfulness; but when the man made a boast of these virtues, it was pretty clear that he assumed more than his due; and he took care to demonstrate his own falsehood immediately afterwards, by drawing a comparison between himself and his fellow-worshipper. In thanking God that he was not like the Publican, he was guilty of the most abominable injustice; for by so doing he ventured to encroach upon the Divine prerogative, in passing a judgment upon one who had not offended him, and whose real character was known only to the Searcher of hearts. Of the positive duties the Pharisee, in common with the rest of his sect, had the most contracted notions, resolving the whole into the performance of a few outward acts which had no moral virtue in them, and which might be as well observed by the sinner as the saint: "I fast twice in the week," said this vainglorious boaster, "I pay tithes of all that I possess;" and here the catalogue of his good qualities being ended, the man went down to his house perfectly satisfied with himself, though not justified in the sight of God. The Publican, on the contrary, who was convinced of his unworthiness, and who had no wish to appear better in the sight of man than he really was in the light of his own conscience, expressed his feelings and his wants in this short but emphatic sentence, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" What he thus

uttered, he thoroughly knew, and sensibly deplored in the bitterness and anguish of his soul; so that, under the heavy pressure of his iniquities, he had neither time nor inclination to scrutinize the imperfections of other men. Though he could hardly fail to hear the contumelious language of the Pharisee, he felt no resentment against the man for his unkindness; nor could the illiberal reproaches of that censorious bigot draw off his attention from the momentous business in which he was engaged. So far from it, the penitent Publican seems to have humbled himself the more deeply before the Almighty when he heard what man had to say against him; and thus he showed in every respect that his repentance was genuine, and that his heart was right towards God. Our Lord, therefore, concludes his account of these characters with a declaration that the righteousness of the Publican exceeded that of the Pharisee, or that "he went down to his house justified rather than the other." Strictly speaking, no man can be said to be righteous, for all have sinned and come short of their duty; but when the Almighty receives the confession of the penitent, the Holy Spirit seals the pardon by an absolution from all offences, which acquittal is a full justification of the believer in the sight of God, and of his own conscience. As this pardon, however, proceeds solely from Divine grace, in accepting of our contrition, so it never is imparted but where there is a thorough repentance and faith which worketh by love, springing from a heart full of humility and an enlarged spirit of charity towards all men. In these particulars the righteousness of the Pharisee was wholly deficient, and that of the Publican genuine and complete. Hence, therefore, we may perceive the true nature of justification, in opposition to those who place it in the meritorious efficacy of works, and those who more prepos-

rously ascribe it to a naked faith, resting upon the Divine promises and the atonement offered for sin by the sacrifice of Christ. Our blessed Lord hath here affirmed, as the application of the parable, that "every one who exalteth himself in his own estimation, on account of his virtues or his opinions, shall be abased; while he who humbleth himself as a sinner publicly before God and man, shall be exalted." The rejected person in the parable was not wholly void of morality; on the contrary, his character, to appearance, was irreproachable; but he wanted the virtues of the heart; and as he did all his works to be praised of men, in their applause and in his own gratification he had his reward. On the other hand, the Publican knew that he had been guilty of many enormities, for which he was now filled with godly sorrow, and resolved, if he should obtain an answer of peace by the confession of his sins before God, to walk in the way of his commandments, and to devote the remainder of his life to the Divine service. From this instructive representation let us learn to examine ourselves, whether the repentance which we profess extends to all the actions of our lives and the imaginations of our minds; so that, when we come into the Divine presence, we may not, like the Pharisee, be guilty of dissembling and cloaking our offences, but by a full acknowledgement of our guilt we may, like the Publican, be relieved from the burden of it, and sent away rejoicing; for "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John, i. 9.

NOVEMBER THE TENTH.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN.

Luke, xviii. 16.—*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.*

OF the minute incidents recorded in our Lord's history, there is hardly one which exceeds the present in pathetic tenderness and general instruction. Not long before his passion, some devout persons, who were powerfully affected by his preaching, and probably moved by the declaration which he had made, that he was about to be taken away from them, brought young children, that he might give them his solemn benediction, with the imposition of his hands. The faith of these affectionate parents, for such undoubtedly they were, was very great, since, with a profound reverence for the authority of Jesus, it had much of that serious thought and prudent concern for the future welfare of their children, which plainly evinced the excellence of their minds and the soundness of their principles. That this act proceeded from the purest motives, and that it was one which ought to be imitated, is evident from the approbation which it received, and the censure passed upon the officious disciples for their unkindness to the friends of these children. We never read that our Lord expressed any displeasure, except where the interests of truth and humanity were injured by narrow prejudices and a churlish conduct. On such occasions he reprehended with severity those who endeavoured to consult his personal ease and honour, at the expense of the great concerns which he came to promote and establish, for the temporal benefit

as well as the eternal welfare of mankind. When, therefore, the friends of these little ones were pressing for an admission into his presence, and the attendants rudely kept them back, as intruding upon the more important engagements of their Lord, He who observed the scene was moved with concern that any of his followers should be wanting in tenderness. Accordingly he broke off in the midst of his discourse, to express his dissatisfaction at the behaviour of his disciples, and to encourage those who came to him for so laudable a purpose. So far was our Lord from being offended at what his mistaken servants considered as an intrusion, that he welcomed these children with pleasure, and improved the opportunity into an occasion of general admonition and exhortation; "Suffer little children," said he, "to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." No stronger proof, indeed, could well be given of the duty of bringing up the tender mind in the knowledge of redemption, than that of representing the infantile disposition as the proper characteristic of his disciples. Surely if we are required to bring our temper into a state of childlike simplicity and absolute submission to the Divine will in all things, it must be no less our duty so to watch over and instruct the opening minds of the young, who are under our fostering care, that wisdom and virtue may become habitual to them in the advanced period of life. If religion be at all necessary to form the ruling principle in man, it cannot be known too early; and of this we may be certain, that as soon as a child is capable of making inquiries, it may be made acquainted with the historical particulars of the Gospel. That person then has no right to complain of the wayward behaviour of youth, who has neglected to prepare them betimes for the conduct of life, by familiarizing them to the example and doctrines of their Saviour. In leaving

this essential part of education to the season when the will is become strong, and the passions are rendered ardent, we should be guilty of as great an error as the husbandman that omitted to sow the seed till the time drew near for its maturation. Next to this fatal mistake, is that of reducing religious instruction to an inferior order, by making every science, whether useful or ornamental, the primary business of learning ; while that which can alone improve the heart, and enable a person to resist the temptations of the world, is taught only at intervals, and without any regard to the magnitude of the subject. One cause why religion is so little understood by those who are expected to be guided by its influence, is the want of its forming a prominent object of study on its own divine principles. When our blessed Lord exhorted parents to bring their children unto him, it was for something else than merely that he might express, by a benevolent sign, his tender affection for these emblems of his redeemed church. Those little ones who were taken up in his arms, were then returned into those of their respective friends, that they might continue to perfect the good work which was thus begun, by watching sedulously over their young minds, guarding them from the seduction of error, and leading them continually in the way of truth. It is reasonable to suppose, that the pious persons who were so anxious to bring their children to Jesus, that they might receive his benediction, would take care to remind them often of this distinguishing circumstance, the relation of which would as naturally lead them to narrate the history of this gracious and wonderful Person. Thus much we are assured of, that in the early age of the Gospel an unremitting attention was paid to the important duty of religious instruction, which began with the first dawnings of the intellectual faculty, and was conducted with systematic regularity, according to

the oracles of Divine Wisdom; for so Timothy was brought up by the care of his mother Lois, and his grandmother Eunice, who in his childhood taught him the "Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation." 2 Ep. iii. 15. In like manner are infants still to be brought to Christ; not only by the sacrament which he hath appointed, but by instilling into their opening minds the principles of righteousness, drawn from those records which testify of him either in history or prophecy, by precept or doctrine, as the author and finisher of our faith.

They who omit this duty altogether, or who are negligent in the proper discharge of it, will be answerable for all the consequences resulting from their culpable disregard of that monition, which amounts to a perpetual and universal commandment; "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." This last declaration is expressive of somewhat more than a bare similarity of character, and indicates that the church should be perpetuated by a succession of members, trained up to the life of faith and the practice of Christian virtue, from their earliest infancy. Such being the case, the obligation of parents to bring up their offspring in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is increased by the consideration, that in failing to do so they injure the church and rob the Redeemer of his right. Some persons flatter themselves, that by giving their children what they term a good education, and taking care to settle them well in the world, they have discharged completely the parental duty; but if religious principles are slightly and indeterminately sown, all other advantages will only expose them to the crafts and snares of the enemy of souls, who is always more busy in corrupting minds half cultivated than even those which are wholly neglected. That

parent, then, who would enjoy the satisfaction of seeing those whom he loves yield fruit answerable to the cares and labours bestowed upon them, must adopt the language of the Psalmist as his constant rule, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Ps. xxxiv. 11.

NOVEMBER, THE ELEVENTH.

THE YOUNG RULER.

Matthew, xix. 20.—*What lack I yet?*

THIS question was propounded to our Lord by a young man of considerable rank and fortune, who, in his own estimation, had made a great progress towards perfection, and yet was laudably ambitious of higher excellence. According to one Evangelist he was the ruler of a synagogue, and all who relate his story observe that he was very rich. Here was then the commendable instance of a youth seriously disposed, and who, notwithstanding his elevated station and great possessions, had an inquisitive desire of knowledge, and a wish to distinguish himself by his attainments in virtue. Some expositors have, therefore, judged too faintly of this noble person, in charging him with hypocrisy; for though his principles were erroneous, owing to a bad education, yet as he behaved to Jesus with great respect, and was regarded by him with affection, he was more an object of pity than of censure. We are told that his impudence to learn some lesson of practical holiness from this Divine Instructor was so great, that he refused him to inquire "what good he should do that he might inherit eternal life." It is evident from this, that the young man entertained a very

honourable opinion of our Saviour, and that he was actuated by a sincere intention to profit by his instructions when he first set out in search of him. The cause of his failure, when the end which he had in view was so good, and his commencement was so promising, may therefore be a very edifying subject of inquiry. That he was of the Pharisaic sect is obvious from the limited ideas which he entertained of the moral law ; for among the wretched fallacies taught by the doctors of that school, one of the worst was this, that a close observance of some particular precepts would be more than a counterbalance for deficiencies in other respects, and that nothing else was necessary to constitute a perfect obedience than an outward conformity to the pandect, as defined and extended by their traditions. The supplementary articles with which they loaded the Divine institute, were equally numerous and trifling, consisting of restrictions upon which the law was silent, and of injunctions, the practice of which neither conduced to the benefit of man nor the honour of God. But by imposing upon themselves new duties, the Pharisees contrived to assume an extraordinary merit above what could be claimed by the more humble and industrious part of the community, who had neither the leisure to study nor the means of complying with these rules. The vainglorious sectaries had yet another mode of advancing their reputation among the people, and that was, by subdividing their own system, and raising those to the degree of perfect persons who made the greatest proficiency in these scrupulous regulations ; while the less zealous and exact of the fraternity were simply called righteous men. Such was the predominant party among the Jews at the time when our blessed Lord came to instruct men in a more excellent way ; and the fame of his wisdom, as well as of his miracles, having made a great impression on this young ruler, he

availed himself of our Lord's passing through that part of the country to learn from him the most effectual method of acquiring that perfection which was the object of his ambition. The Divine Instructor, who knew what corrupt notions had been instilled into the mind of this inquirer, and yet was willing to give him a more correct and enlarged view of the law of God, rebuked him for applying the title of good to any master upon earth. Our Saviour thus taught him, at the very beginning, that the perfection which he sought was not only ideal, but injurious to the Divine Majesty, as it was nothing less than setting up a rule of life as the standard of excellence, in direct competition with that which was revealed from heaven. To show still farther the folly and wickedness of those teachers by whom the young man had been misled, Jesus enumerated the principal commandments of the second table; upon which the ruler, who expected somewhat more refined than precepts familiarized to him in his childhood, observed, "All these have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" He imagined that our Lord, like the subtle professors whose lectures he had attended, would have stated some particular obligation beyond the ordinary line of duty prescribed to vulgar minds, and that at the same time he would have favoured him with specific directions for the due performance of what he enjoined. As far as the commandments went, he fancied himself to have already attained perfection; but he was anxious for pre-eminence in that external holiness which he had been led to believe constituted the height of religious purity. Our Lord, therefore, to abate this confidence, and to convince both him and the persons who witnessed this scene that the Divine law was more spiritual, and required a fuller obedience than what the Pharisaic righteousness could pretend to be, observed, that he fell short of that very virtue which

in his own judgment he had already acquired. "One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross and follow me." Mark, x. 21. Such was the test by which this particular case was tried, and there were certainly some instances of persons then present who had completely done what was now proposed to this ruler; for the Apostles, who were in constant attendance upon Jesus, could say with truth that they had left all for his sake. The property and connexions of these men were of as great consequence to them as the vast wealth of the young man could be to him, and in some respects more so; for most of them had friends, who were in a great measure dependent upon their labours. Yet these disciples readily left their families and occupations to follow One who had not where to lay his head; and, with the exception of a single individual, they cheerfully endured poverty and persecution during the remainder of their lives, for the purpose of making known the way of life to mankind. Still what was here proposed as the highest point of perfection, neither formed an indispensable part of the Christian morality, nor would it have been enjoined in the present instance, if the inquirer had possessed less vanity; and if, instead of trusting so much to his virtues, he had sought for truth in a spirit of humility. But as nothing short of a complete outward righteousness would content him, and as he had no idea of his own failings, it was proper to turn his attention to a serious examination of the principles of religion, which he despised or treated as of little value. The young man, though grieved at his disappointment, was not long in making his election; for his former tutors had never inculcated any such maxim as that of renouncing the treasures of this life for those of another. Those men were too covetous

of riches and ambitious of honours, to recommend any thing that would condemn their own conduct ; with them, therefore, the love of God and the love of the world were perfectly compatible with each other. Our Saviour uniformly taught a different lesson ; and when the ruler found how difficult it was to attain perfection in this school, he went his way sorrowful, for he had great possessions. The observation which our Lord made upon this occurrence, that " it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," has often perplexed the readers of the history, as it did the disciples who heard the saying. But the particular meaning of this proverbial expression, which was current among the Jews to denote any very difficult thing, must be sought in the incident to which it was applied. Here then we find an opulent person, who truly admired the character of Christ, but at the same time he loved his own possessions more ; and though he would willingly have attended to the doctrine of this great Teacher, yet when it required the sacrifice of his wealth for the benefit of the poor, heaven itself was too dear to be purchased at such a price. His wealth adhered as closely to his mind as the protuberance of the camel makes a part of its nature ; and of this we may be assured, that as long as temporal things engross the affections of any one, he will have very unworthy notions of those which are eternal. Riches themselves, however, are but matters indifferent ; and the person that has them in abundance may be, and often is, more humble and religious than the man who has none. It is the worldly spirit which is here condemned, as an insurmountable obstacle to an admission into the Gospel kingdom, not the actual enjoyment of those blessings which have been honestly acquired ; for our Lord had among his disciples some who

were both rich and good, with whom he lived on terms of particular intimacy, and whose names are recorded as bright examples of faith and piety. Among the Gentile converts, also, there were many affluent and honourable persons, concerning whom the Apostle gave these instructions, which afford in fact a perfect commentary on this discourse of our Saviour; "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute; willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

NOVEMBER THE TWELFTH.

PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS.

Matt. xx. 16.—*So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen.*

THE observations which our Lord made upon the danger of riches to those engaged in his service, appear to have produced a considerable sensation in the minds of his disciples; and Peter, with his wonted eagerness, thus expressed himself on the behalf of his brethren: "Behold, we have left all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" This certainly savoured of a worldly principle, and the answer of Jesus plainly conveyed a censure of that spirit which dictated the question: "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." But, that he might minister consolation and encouragement with correction, he delivered this promise, "Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in

the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." That there was some obscurity in this declaration to those who heard it, is very probable, for it was wholly predictive of what should take place at the commencement of the mediatorial kingdom of Christ; the nature of which, it was neither meet at that time for him to explain, nor for them fully to understand. Besides, the promise did not belong exclusively to the apostolical body then assembled, for there was one in the number who went woefully to his own place before the crucifixion of his Master, whom he basely betrayed into the hands of his enemies. But the principal difficulty will be removed by reading the passage, as it ought to be rendered, conditionally; "Ye who shall have followed me in the regeneration, shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel;" which is the true sense, and implies that the faithful servants of Christ, whether such as were then present or their successors, should obtain a high distinction in the establishment of the church, and be suitably rewarded for their labours at the consummation of all things. This great work, for which the Son of God was content to lay aside his Divine glory, is called the regeneration, because it is a renewal of the moral world, and a conversion of sinners from the darkness of error to the light of truth, and a quickening of their minds to the knowledge and love of holiness, as the principle of divine life in the human soul. From these words of our Saviour, then, we learn, that as the Apostles were to follow him in the high employment of building up the sacred edifice that was to supersede the political and ceremonial institute of Israel, so they who came after them in the same important concern, should, for the diligent discharge of their duty, obtain an equal portion of his regard and distinction. Thus,

while the Head of the Church gave his immediate followers an assurance that their work and labour of love should be duly remembered and suitably blessed, he warned them also against indulging the pernicious conceit, that their peculiar hardships and severity of service would entitle them to the pre-eminence over their brethren in the ministry. So far from allowing any such claim, he freely told them, that in remote ages and far-distant climes, disciples should arise, highly endowed with gifts and enriched with grace, whose fidelity and zeal would place them upon a level with the best of those whom he now addressed. To illustrate this matter more familiarly, and according to his usual mode of instruction, our Lord condescended to compare himself to a householder, who early in the morning, or at the dawn of the Gospel-day, went out in person to hire labourers for his vineyard, and having met with such as he thought suitable for his purpose, he engaged them at stipulated wages. About the third hour the same vigilant and benevolent lord went into the place of public resort, and finding some persons unemployed, he sent them into his grounds, with a general promise that what was right they should receive. The like occurrence took place at the sixth, and again at the ninth hour; nay, so liberal and compassionate was this indefatigable householder, that at the eleventh hour, when the season of labour was almost closed, he remonstrated with those whom he found idle, and engaged them also in his service. At night the steward was directed to settle with these labourers, beginning with those who had been last hired, and who received each man a Roman penny, the customary wages for agricultural work in those days, and amounting to seven pence halfpenny of our money. The same sum was paid to the rest; which being observed by those who were first employed, they expected to have received more; and when they were

disappointed, one of them presumed to complain of the master's partiality. Nothing, certainly, could be more unreasonable than this conduct; for, as the householder justly remarked, his liberality towards some, bound him by no obligation to others, whose duty it was to be contented with the wages for which they had agreed to serve him; and in being displeased at the goodness shown to their fellow-labourers, they only betrayed an envious heart and an unthankful disposition. "So," said our Lord in his application of the parable, "the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen." This allegorical representation, besides teaching us for our comfort that the services of the faithful, in the last age of the world, will be as acceptable to the Lord of the vineyard as those of the men who received their instructions immediately from himself, contains also a direct promise to the church, that her gracious Ruler will watch continually over her interests, and provide proper labourers "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Eph. iv. 12, 13.

NOVEMBER THE THIRTEENTH.

BLIND BARTIMEUS.

Mark, x. 48.—*Many charged him that he should hold his peace; but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

THE blessed Jesus was continually employed in labouring for the benefit of mankind, either preach-

ing the most salutary doctrines to convince them of their errors and to guide them in the way of righteousness, or working some great miracles for the cure of their bodily infirmities and the restoration of those faculties of which they had long been deprived. Towards the close of his eventful life his labours multiplied, and his journeys, for the purpose of healing the spiritual and corporeal maladies of men, were incessant; so that he not only seemed to be without a resting-place where he might lay his head, but even to have hardly allowed himself any time for repose at all. His years were comparatively few in the whole, and the space of time between his baptism and death was but short; yet the history of that period comprehends not only actions the most marvellous, but instances of benevolence out of number, and discourses far exceeding in value the accumulated wisdom of ages. Though his example is beyond our imitation; yet as far as relates to the activity and benignity, the employment of time, and the purity of conversation, displayed by our Lord, his entire conduct becomes to us a rule and a pattern. We see here, that by unwearied exertion and a steadfast purpose ever fixed upon one great object, the Saviour and Instructor of men continually performed the Divine will, and did all that he came into the world to execute, whether in the way of practical labour or of patient suffering. He was now on his way to Jerusalem, where he had to endure the severest agonies, and to lay down his life an offering for human transgression; yet, with this dismal prospect in view, he neither showed uneasiness nor fear; the hurry of an agitated, nor the sullen gloom of a despondent mind. On the contrary, he appeared more assiduous and zealous as he advanced to the close of his great mission; being ready at every step to relieve the distressed, and devoting almost the whole of his time to edifying instruction. This deportment seems

to have misled some of the disciples into their old error, that he was now about to restore the kingdom to Israel; which notion induced them to solicit high distinctions and great places under his government. To correct these false principles and carnal expectations, he took the twelve apart, and made them acquainted with the exact particulars of his approaching passion; but so blinded were their understandings by the desire of ease and splendour, that they could not comprehend his meaning, and seem to have fancied that all these things were spoken only by way of parable and illustration. On leaving Jericho an occurrence took place, which showed that a poor blind beggar, who had hardly any means of acquiring knowledge, possessed more faith than these Apostles, after having heard the doctrine of redemption explained by the Divine Teacher, and seen his mighty works. When Bartimeus, who sat by the wayside waiting for the pittance of charity upon which he depended for his daily support, heard the noise of the crowd, his curiosity was excited by the unusual circumstance; and on making inquiry, he was told that Jesus of Nazareth passed by. The name of this extraordinary Person, of whose miracles he had been informed, instantly kindled a glimmering of hope in the mind of this desolate being; and knowing that no time was to be lost, he began to cry aloud for help to Jesus, as the Messiah or the Son of David. The unfeeling populace endeavoured to restrain the man from his importunity, and they even went so far as to treat him roughly for being so vehement in his language; but their rebukes could not silence Bartimeus, who justly concluded, that if the present opportunity was lost, such another might never happen again; and being assured that One whose general character was so amiable would readily forgive this intrusion, he redoubled his cries, which Jesus heard, and commanded the man to be brought before him. Bartimeus joyfully cast away

his cloak, that it might be no incumbrance to him, and then hastened to receive the blessing which he expected, humbly praying for the restoration of his sight, and expressing his full belief of the Divine power and authority of our Lord. With the bodily sense this poor man obtained also the illumination of his understanding and the renovation of his heart; for he became a sincere follower of Christ, and he publicly glorified God. Such was the miracle wrought by our Saviour in his last journey to Jerusalem; so that had Bartimeus hearkened to the inconsiderate multitude, instead of listening to the small still voice which told him, that now was the accepted time, and that this was the day of salvation, he might have remained both blind and a beggar all the rest of his life. Let this incident teach us to profit while we enjoy the day of grace; and when the Saviour speaks to us in his word and by the monition of conscience, let us cast away every incumbrance, and hasten to embrace the mercy which he offers, lest the season of redemption should escape us, never more to return. Every passing moment, and the minutest circumstances of our lives, forcibly remind us of the necessity of securing our eternal peace before it is for ever hid from our eyes. But while the rest of animated nature adapt their pursuits and enjoyments to their respective seasons, man alone is negligent of his opportunities of improvement, till that period arrives when his faculties are unfitted for application and his judgment too feeble for exertion. Let it be our constant care, then, to carry the counsel of the Preacher into all our labours; "Whatsoever thy hand findeth necessary to be done, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Eccles. ix. 10.

NOVEMBER THE FOURTEENTH.

CONVERSION OF ZACCHEUS.

Luke, xix. 10.—*The Son of Man is, come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

It has been observed, that there is a crisis in the lives of most men, which by improvement or neglect decides their future character. Of the truth of this remark we have just had an instance in the conduct of the blind beggar of Jericho, who seized the only opportunity ever offered him of recovering his sight. Shortly after this another incident occurred, illustrative of the same maxim, in the conversion of Zaccheus, the chief of the tax-gatherers; an office at all times odious to the Jews, but particularly so when filled, as in the present case, by one of their countrymen. The unpopularity of these collectors was indeed for the most part merited by their arbitrary proceedings and enormous exactions. We find, from the confession of Zaccheus, that in the discharge of his trust he had sometimes exceeded the bounds of justice; for which, this excuse only could be alleged, that he had done no more than follow the custom of his predecessors. But though this man enjoyed a considerable post, in which he had acquired great wealth, his behaviour showed that he was neither haughty nor uncharitable. On hearing that Jesus was in his neighbourhood, he had a desire to see one of whom fame reported such wonderful things; but being little of stature, Zaccheus could not force his way through the crowd which surrounded our Lord in his progress. A disappointment of this kind would have induced a proud man to relinquish the pursuit with contempt; but Zaccheus, who was actuated by somewhat better than

mere curiosity, ran forwards till he came to a part of the road where he knew that the object of his inquiry would pass, and climbing a sycamore-tree, he waited patiently for his arrival. Trivial as this circumstance may seem to those who form higher notions of the dignity of history than of its utility, the action which we are now contemplating is abundantly instructive, as it shows the benefit of perseverance in a laudable course, and the blessing attending humility in the use of means. Had a Pharisee taken any pains to get access to Jesus, it would have been for the purpose of perplexing him by some ensnaring question, or of obtaining some matter of accusation against him ; but such a man would have thought his consequence degraded in mounting a tree to obtain a sight of so extraordinary a person. Zaccheus, on the contrary, felt no shame in so demeaning himself, even in the presence of many who knew him well, and who would no doubt be greatly surprized at seeing him in such a situation. While he sat amidst the wide branches of the sycamore-tree, he had no idea of being observed by one to whom he was an utter stranger ; but our Lord, who knew what was in man, discerned in this person a mind inclined to truth, and willing to show the fruits of it in his life and conversation. On coming to the spot, therefore, the Redeemer looked up and said, " Zaccheus, make haste, and come down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house." Instead of being abashed by this address, or of excusing himself as unworthy to entertain such a guest, Zaccheus descended, and went home with joy, to make suitable preparations for his reception. But this condescension of Jesus was highly offensive to the spectators, who could not reconcile it to their rules of propriety, that so great a reformer should enter the house of one whose very profession they accounted sinful. Their complaints indeed were so

vehement, that Zaccheus himself was affected by them; and, to manifest the sincerity of his repentance, he thus addressed our Saviour: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wronged any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Whether this was an act of immediate resolution, the effect of that doctrine which he had heard from this Preacher of righteousness, or whether Zaccheus, in vindicating himself from the aspersions cast upon him by his illiberal accusers, made a declaration of what he was in the habit of doing, his conduct in either case demonstrated the reality of his conversion. He did not limit restitution to the quantity of the injury, but he quadrupled the satisfaction, to express his sorrow for the wrong, and to make up for any loss which his oppression might have occasioned. As a farther proof of his penitence, and to make some amends for offences, the nature and objects of which were either forgotten or could not be exactly ascertained, he appropriated half of his income to the relief of the poor. Thus did Zaccheus show his faith by his works; not in an ostentatious display of them, but with an ample confession of his manifold transgressions. In this narrative, then, we may plainly observe the nature of repentance, which consists less in words and sentiment than in actions and demeanour. Here also may be learnt the answer to that question which has produced so much intemperate controversy, respecting the terms of our acceptance with God; for the answer of our Lord to the confession of this publican was a complete absolution: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." It was an operative faith which made this man a partaker of salvation; and thus from his example every sinner is encouraged to seek the Redeemer with full purpose

of heart ; for no infirmities will he despise, neither will he reject any on account of their offences, provided they come to him with contrition and an earnest desire to obtain that grace which may enable them in future to walk in the way of his commandments. Our Lord was now on his last journey ; had Zaccheus, then, neglected this opportunity, his eyes would not have been blessed with that sight which his soul so greatly desired. Thus are we taught the necessity of using diligently all the means that may be offered of obtaining an interest in that salvation which the Messiah is still ready to impart unto those who wait upon him in the way of his appointment ; for his word is sure and nigh unto every man who will seriously attend unto it ; “ Behold, I stand at the door, and knock ; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Rev. iii. 20.

NOVEMBER THE FIFTEENTH.

THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

Luke, xix. 41.—*And when he was come near he beheld the city, and wept over it.*

THE position, that patriotism forms no part of the Christian system, as laid down by its holy Founder, is refuted by his entire history ; from which it appears that his life was devoted to the public good, and that in this respect, as well as in all others, the example which he set is a rule for all his followers of every age and clime. When he drew near the close of his labours, he was still anxious to save his country from the ruin which hung over it ; and for this purpose he resolved to enter Jerusalem in such a manner as to draw upon him the general attention

of the people, and particularly to call the heads of the state to a final decision of his claims. This was, therefore, an awful crisis on which the fate of the nation depended, and it was marked by some expressive signs, which pointed out the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies in the person of Jesus, as the promised Messiah. It was explicitly foretold that the King of Zion should make his public entry into the capital with great solemnity, and yet with peculiar circumstances of humility, riding upon the foal of an ass. This was literally verified when our Lord sent two of his disciples to fetch an animal of this description from a neighbouring village, which they did without any other hindrance on the part of the owners, than an inquiry for what use it was designed. Here, then, was no preconcerted scheme to adjust the event to the prediction; for the parties who were instrumental to the transaction were ignorant of the oracle, and of course could have no idea beyond the simple fact of accommodating Jesus, or of doing him honour on this occasion. The case, however, was different with respect to the priests and Pharisees; for they were too conversant in the prophetic Scriptures to have overlooked that very extraordinary one in Zechariah, which described so minutely the coming of Christ into his kingdom. That these men were well acquainted with the prediction, and that they were attentive observers of its completion, appears from the offence which they took at the disciples, who ascribed to their Master that triumphant song of the Psalmist in which the Messiah is represented as ascending with glory, from his state of humiliation, to the possession of his throne: "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven and glory in the highest." The persons by whom this hymn was sung, were filled with gladness on finding that Jesus had now laid aside his reserve, and was advancing,

as they imagined, to that elevation which had long been the fond object of their expectation. But the Pharisees, on the contrary, beheld the scene with rancorous malignity and inveterate envy; being neither convinced by the evidence of miracles, nor awed into respect by the accomplishment of the prophecies. The multitude, it is true, readily joined the disciples in their acclamations, and were willing enough to have hailed Jesus as their king, in that sense which would have gratified their thirst for power and their desire of revenge. A people with such unworthy principles and carnal notions could have no permanent attachment, and were therefore, as our Lord well knew, equally ready to crown or to crucify him, according as they were moved by their prejudices or instigated by their deceivers. Thus surrounded by a few faithful attendants, amidst an immense concourse of idle and inconsiderate spectators, the Saviour of men approached the walls of Jerusalem, and "when he beheld the city he wept." But it was not for himself that he felt the sensation of grief, while the people around him were shouting for joy; his sorrow arose not from an apprehension of the dreadful ills that awaited him, and of the excruciating death which was to succeed all this parade of popularity. Jesus did not weep on account of his own sufferings, or because he knew that the same multitude would, for the most part at least, in a few days be clamorous for his crucifixion; but he wept on considering that the period of mercy was now closing upon this impenitent generation for ever; that the cup of iniquity wanted only the guilt of shedding his blood to overflow; after which there would "remain no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation." Heb. x. 26, 27. Thus did the Redeemer manifest his compassion to those who had no feeling for themselves; and though his eye penetrated into the re-

most ages, and saw his church spreading over all lands, by the preaching of the Gospel which the Jews despised, yet he was filled with sorrow for Jerusalem, and he lamented the miseries that were about to fall upon her children. From this example, then, we learn that it is the duty of every man to have the interests of his native land near at heart, to promote its welfare by his exertions, to avert, as far as lies in his power, threatened evils, and to mourn the calamities which he can neither prevent nor remedy. The Christian that has a strong confidence in the God of his salvation, who maketh all things work together for good to them that love him, will be far from indifferent to the moral character and circumstances of the country to which he belongs. He has indeed an enlarged benevolence for all the human family as the common objects of the Divine benignity; but at the same time he has also a peculiar sympathy for his relatives and friends, the society of which he is a member, and the nation to which he owes allegiance. On the behalf of that community where he enjoys civil protection and religious advantages, the comforts of life and the means of grace, he will pray, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." Ps. cxxii. 7.

NOVEMBER THE SIXTEENTH.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

Matt. xxi. 19.—And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away.

WE have contemplated the Redeemer weeping over the devoted city when he entered into it amidst the

acclamations of the people, who welcomed him as their Messiah, with songs of praise and bearing palm-branches in their hands, the emblems of peace and victory. To men of ordinary judgments this melancholy impressed on the countenance of Jesus would have appeared unseasonable ; and such persons estimating every thing according to their present feelings, would have regarded the joy of the people as indicating a favourable change in the national character. But our Lord knew that this popularity was not the effect of any serious inquiry or virtuous principle in the inhabitants of Jerusalem, whose attachment arose only from mercenary motives, and was therefore certain of vanishing at the least disappointment. That carnal spirit by which they were actuated, in this instance was ready, as the event demonstrated, to demand the life of the very person whom they now esteemed as a prophet, and to receive as their king. A striking emblem of this people appeared the morning after the transaction which we have been considering ; for when Jesus was on his return from Bethany, being hungry, he went towards a fig-tree, which at a distance had all the signs of fruitfulness, but on examination was found covered with leaves only. One of the Evangelists, in his account of this judicial miracle, says, that “ the time of figs was not yet ;” which observation has occasioned some impertinent objections to the truth of the history, and many laboured explications to remove a faucied difficulty. If indeed by the “ time of figs,” the season of their growth or ripeness were to be understood, it would be no easy matter to account either for the expectation of fruit or the malediction of the tree. But the very period when the circumstance occurred proves that it was the time of fructification, for the passover was celebrated in the spring, when, as we learn from all authorities, human and sacred, the Syrian fig attains

its perfection of flavour and of smell. By the time, then, in this place, is to be understood the proper period for gathering the fruit, which in Judca was determined by a customary usage, since, till the second day of unleavened bread, which, when this affair happened, was yet to come, the owners of the trees were obliged to suffer the figs to remain on them, even though they were fully ripe. Nothing, therefore, could be more reasonable than to look for fruit of this description upon a tree which was rich in foliage, and that too when the harvest was not as yet begun. But luxuriant as the tree might be in appearance, which of itself was sufficient to justify the expectation of fruit, it was a mere deception to the traveller and useless to the owner, for which it was dried up by the roots.

This was one of those typical actions by which important truths were taught for the present edification of those who beheld them, and future events predicted for the instruction of posterity. In the fate of this tree they who witnessed its destruction might plainly see the just doom of the hypocritical professor of religion, who made a fair show in the sight of men, while he was utterly unprofitable before God. Here also the Apostles might perceive realized in a miracle that which they had before heard in a parable, when their Lord described the Jewish church and people under the symbol of a tree planted in a rich soil, and attended with the greatest care, yet at every returning season presenting nothing to the view but a profusion of leaves. By much importunity the keeper of the vineyard obtained a respite of one year longer, as the final probation of this ostentatious tree; and in that space renewed efforts were made, by digging and dressing, to produce a favourable change in its character. That period was now drawn to a close, and yet after all the miracles and discourses of our Saviour, and

those who were commissioned by him to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, the tree remained in the same barren condition. The moral character and religious principles of the people still continued unimproved; and so far were the rulers from acknowledging the day of their visitation, they hardened themselves more inflexibly against every warning, and resisted the united force of prophecy and miracles. But the divine dispensations have their limits; and though the season of grace may be long, it will come to an end; when they who have neglected the labour bestowed upon them, and the mercies they enjoyed, will have to lament their sin or their misery. This was now to be the case of that family to whom the Almighty revealed his will at sundry times and in divers manners by the prophets; and, lastly, by his Son, the heir of all things. Here the season of long-suffering finished, and henceforth the stream of grace and knowledge was to take another direction, leaving the remnant of Israel as a withered trunk, having indeed the form of subsistence, but being destitute of vitality. "Let no man eat fruit of thee for ever," said our Lord to the fig-tree; and what was then fulfilled in the type has been verified to the utmost extent in the Jewish people, who have not only lost their civil polity and social order, but even their religious institutions have undergone so material an alteration as hardly to bear the shadow of resemblance to the original, from whence they profess to be derived. As the tree was not smitten by a blast from heaven, but perished for the want of a further supply of nutrition, so was it with the state which it represented; and thus it ever will be with nations and individuals who abuse from one year to another the grace of God and the blessings of his providence, till the appointed day comes suddenly and silently upon each, with this dreadful denunciation, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Luke, xiii. 7.

NOVEMBER THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

Matt. xxii. 2, 3.—*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king who made a marriage for his son; and sent forth his servants to call them that were hidden to the wedding, and they would not come.*

THAT the design of Christianity was to promote universal happiness by the practice of holiness, is evident from its doctrines and precepts, the example of its Author, and the description given by him of that kingdom which he came to establish. Even the miracles and parables, which seem to have had no other object than the immediate benefit of the persons who attended our Lord's ministry, were calculated to convey comfort and instruction to believers in every age. Those local allusions and peculiar customs, which in other histories often perplex the sense and embarrass the reader, never fail in the Gospels to give a lively interest to the narrative, and to point out the practical lesson it was intended to impart. Of this we have a striking instance in the parable before us, the primary intention of which was to justify the Divine proceedings towards the Jewish nation, and to announce the influx of the Gentiles into the church. "The kingdom of heaven, or the dispensation of the Gospel under the Messiah, is like unto a certain king who made a marriage for his son," which, according to the eastern manner, was to be celebrated with great pomp and festivity for many days, during which all other business was to be suspended, and the attention of the guests devoted to such services only as would do honour to the royal espousals. On such occasions every thing was

conducted with the utmost splendour and liberality ; for which purpose many costly preparations were made, and a number of persons invited. To slight the ceremony, therefore, was always considered as a high affront ; and to appear at it in mean and uncourtly attire, was deemed inexcusable in a country where the dresses were all uniform, and where proper habiliments were provided without charge for those who needed them. When the time drew nigh for the nuptials of the exalted personage mentioned in the parable, the parties who had been apprized of the event by many monitions, and prepared for it by numerous favours, to give them an eminent distinction in the ceremony, refused to come. They made light of the invitation, and preferred the labour of their farms and the pursuit of their merchandize to the honour of sitting down to a magnificent feast in the palace of the great king. Such indeed was their obstinate stupidity, and so base their ingratitude, that they cruelly treated the messengers who came to call them to the entertainment ; and at last they proceeded to such a height of malignity as to murder the persons who were sent upon that benevolent mission. This was an exact picture of the Jewish people, who were very early made acquainted with the promise of redemption, and whose oracles represented the coming of the Messiah as a spiritual marriage, because it was to commence a new relation between God and man. But by a strange perverseness, instead of looking for salvation in its true and exalted sense, suited to the infinite majesty of Him by whom it was to be accomplished, the grovelling nation reduced the ordinances of their religion, and the prophecies of the Messiah, to a carnal sense, as indicating temporal grandeur and extended dominion. As the fullness of time approached for the manifestation of the Son of God in human nature, that he might reconcile all things,

both in heaven and upon earth, by his humiliation, the worldly spirit and malevolent disposition of the Jews increased; so that the harbinger of grace ushered in the glad season with little effect; the Saviour himself appeared with power and was despised, while his messengers went forth in his name and were persecuted. This was the state of Judea when the parable was delivered to those who comprehended its design, but denied the application. They were aware that this representation was intended to describe their sensuality and ambition, their prejudice and corruption; but no language could subdue the obdurate infidelity of men whose ideas of a Saviour were limited to the expectation of a mighty victor, who should enable them by his prowess to regain their independence, and to render permanent those institutions which were intended only to be the "shadow of better things to come." Heb. x. 1. Thus the people to whom the overture of grace was originally revealed, and who were called to prepare themselves for the reception of the Prince of Peace, rejected the invitation, because it did not correspond with their mercenary views and selfish inclinations. Though excessively bigotted to forms and ceremonies, they had more regard to their own interest than the Divine honour, and were more attached to frivolous traditions which encouraged them in their narrow principles, than to the spirit of religion. Such was the character of the people who bore the high appellative of the chosen of God; and yet, notwithstanding their immense advantages, they were cut off on account of unbelief; let us, therefore, to whom their privileges have been transferred, take warning by their fate, and "be not high-minded, but fear." Rom. xi. 20.

NOVEMBER THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE WEDDING GARMENT.

Matt. xxii. 13.—*Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

FROM the folly of man divine wisdom educes good; and that perverseness which endeavours to counteract the purposes of grace is frequently made instrumental to accelerate their accomplishment. Of this we have a proof in the history of the Jews, who by their rejection of the Messiah hastened the conversion of the Gentiles, and by their dispersion became the means of spreading the knowledge of salvation in various lands. The parable of the marriage feast exhibits a descriptive picture of this obduracy of the chosen people, and the consequences which resulted from their dereliction to the rest of mankind. When the parties who were first called to the royal entertainment, refused to comply with the invitation, the Sovereign whom they had so ungratefully treated gave directions that the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, should be made partakers of that bounty which the others had despised. In the parallel apologue related by our Lord on another occasion, the messengers are represented as bringing this account to their master, "It is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room;" on which the sphere of their operations was extended beyond the streets of the city, to the highways and hedges, where they were directed to gather all whom they should find, and compel them to come in. This was a lively representation of what took place at the first propagation of the Gospel; for the commission of

the Apostles was opened in Judea, and limited within that district, till the national impiety occasioned an extension of their powers, and they were enjoined to "go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature." Accordingly, when the servants of God were endowed with power from on high, by the descent of the Holy Ghost, they went out among all nations, and by the demonstration of the Spirit they urged or compelled the Gentiles to enter into that kingdom from which the Jews had excluded themselves by their impenitence. But no other compulsion was used than that of a divine energy; nor does the religion of Jesus allow of any force but that which is applied to the heart by persuasion, and to the understanding by conviction. The characters to whom the Gospel was imparted, were aptly figured in the parable as lame and blind; for such was the moral condition of all the Gentiles till they became acquainted with the grace of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ. They had neither the knowledge of the Divine will, nor any prospect of immortality, being incapable of fulfilling the law of nature, even as far as it was understood by them, and utterly ignorant of that atonement which was provided by Infinite Mercy for human transgression. There was a mixture of bad and good at the parabolical feast; and such must necessarily be the state of the visible church, while it is committed to the administration of men who, with all their zeal, are no more than earthen vessels; for if there was a traitor among the Apostles when the Son of God had the personal charge of his community, it cannot be supposed that of those who bear his name there will be none to dishonour him by their evil works. Our Lord took care to guard against any such expectation, by describing a case that happened when the guests were collected in the royal mansion, and the king came to examine their appearance. The first object that

struck his attention was one who had not on a wedding garment; and when the man was asked his reason for this singularity, he was confused and speechless. As proper robes were always provided on such occasions, this person was not only guilty of a violation of decorum, but of a wilful disrespect to the laws and government of the place. The confusion of the man arose, as we may well imagine, from his surprize, and his being wholly unprepared for such a question, thinking probably that in so vast an assemblage his unbecoming garb might pass unnoticed. But in this he was mistaken, for the king would suffer no deviation from established order in his palace, whatever there might be in the manners and customs of the world; he therefore ordered this intruder "to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness." It is plain, from the tenour of Scripture, that the indispensable garment here mentioned is that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord;" for had it been any thing else, the stranger, in the parable, might have alleged ignorance as his excuse for an inattention to forms which were above his condition; but as no plea was offered, so no indulgence was granted, which showed that this was a culpable neglect and an unpardonable offence. The time was now past for a reparation of the error, and no substitute could be obtained to supply the place of that which had been omitted. Thus we learn, that when life is ended, the means of grace end with it; and that as there is no repentance beyond the grave, so nothing will avail us in the presence of the Judge of all the earth, if we shall be found deficient in that righteousness which is enjoined in the Gospel as the habit of our mind and the rule of our conversation. Whatever else a man may possess, whether of knowledge or faith, morals or reputation, if he is wanting in this, he will be bound in his spiritual faculties; remaining

sensible of his loss, but wholly deprived of that hope which, in every other situation, is a stimulus to exertion and a consolation to the miserable. They who are banished from the Divine presence must sink down in palpable darkness, in which all the power that is left to them is the consciousness of an interminable existence, and the inextinguishable reflexion on opportunities of mercy and happiness that are gone for ever. If, therefore, we would become inhabitants of that city which hath no need of the sun to lighten it, because the Lord God is the light thereof, let us walk circumspectly in this day of our probation, remembering who hath said, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me; to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. xxii. 12.

NOVEMBER THE NINETEENTH.

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING.

Luke, xxi. 3.—*Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.*

RELIGION is not a matter of speculation, but of affection; and must have its seat in the heart as well as the understanding. The principle of faith is to be manifested in our actions, by a regular discharge of the duties which God hath commanded, and an attention to those ordinances which he hath appointed. It is in this way only that we can show our sense of the blessings we have received, or answer the end for which they were bestowed, by contributing as far as lies in our power to the diffusion of divine truth and the edification of our neighbours. Our blessed Lord on all occasions enforced the necessity of inward righteousness; but at the same time he was

so far from undervaluing outward forms, that he praised those who attended them in a right spirit, and he sanctioned the observance of them by his own example. It was his constant practice, when engaged in the work of the ministry, to visit the synagogue every sabbath; and on the great festivals he went to Jerusalem, for the express purpose of attending the services of the temple; so that among the various charges that were brought against him, none ever ventured to accuse him of a want of respect to the national worship. He paid the customary tribute levied for the support of the sacred edifice, even when it was polluted by many sacrilegious innovations; and he noticed with satisfaction the liberality of those who brought their free-will offerings to the treasury. These gifts were not, as some have represented them, mere alms for charitable uses, but the contributions of pious worshippers for the maintenance of the building, its altar, and ministers. While our Saviour and his disciples sat contemplating the actions of the different persons who brought their respective donations to the chests, that were placed for the purpose in the court of the temple, a poor woman came up and threw in two mites, the smallest of coin, and contemptible, when compared with the profusion of riches which were poured in by the people, who came from all parts to the celebration of the passover. But this trifling oblation, which probably excited a smile of contempt in most of the spectators, had a different effect on Him who estimated the gift by the intention, and not according to its magnitude; and who thus expressed his judgment of the transaction: "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all those have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God; but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had." Thus it is evident that the purposes to which

the offering was applied, met with the Divine approbation, no less than the motives of the honest-hearted giver; and therefore we are taught by this instance of piety, and the encomium pronounced upon it, that it is our incumbent duty to appropriate part of our substance to the support of religion, as a testimony of our reverence to God, and a wish to promote the welfare of our fellow-creatures. This poor widow lived in very degenerate times, and under a corrupt establishment, which was now hastening fast to its dissolution; yet she was thankful for the privilege of worshipping the Almighty in his sanctuary, defiled as it was by the evil practices of those who had the care of it, and perverted as the sacred institutions were by the inventions of men. The temple, however, was still the house of God, and thither this humble creature came with holy affection to offer her devotions, to supplicate the pardon of her offences, and to renew her faith in that atonement which was figured in the sacrifices of the altar. Miserable as her circumstances were, she was rich towards God, and she had a thankful heart for mercies, of which they who despised her had little or no conception. This woman was indeed without a friend upon earth, and she had now parted with her last farthing; but it was in the service of her heavenly Father, upon whom she relied for the supply of all her wants, and whose grace she knew was more than sufficient for her utmost need. It is too common with the poor to think that their duties are few because their means are scanty; but this gracious woman, who was reduced to the lowest state of wretchedness, did not make her penury an excuse for the neglect of positive institutions. She both attended the services of the temple, and cheerfully contributed all that she had for the benefit of the holy place, knowing that He who gave her the will could sanctify the offering,

however insignificant it might be in the world's esteem, or disproportionate to the vast concern to which it was consecrated. This incident, while it teaches us to devote all that we have to the Divine glory, instructs us likewise in the manner of performing our duty, by showing that it must be in exact conformity to the ordinances of God, and not regulated by the opinions of men. Here, also, the poor and the simple are taught and encouraged to serve the Lord with pious confidence, and to employ their faculties in the advancement of religion, according to the rules and institutions which have been settled for the government of the church. Every man hath his range of service; and though his talent be but small and his influence weak, yet if he improves his powers with diligence, and is careful to let his light shine before men, he shall receive a blessing from Him who applauded the offering of the widow; for "where there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." 2 Cor. viii. 12.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTIETH.

THE FATE OF JERUSALEM.

Matt. xxiii. 38, 39.—*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

THUS our blessed Lord concluded his last public discourse, in which he severely reprehended the heads of the nation for their gross hypocrisy, and lamented the infatuation of the people, in being deceived by those false guides to their own destruction. On leaving the temple and closing his mi-

nistry, the Redeemer denounced the cessation of the Mosaic economy, by the departure of the Divine presence, which had hitherto sanctified the ordinances of religion, and preserved the peculiar privileges and institutions of the civil community. As a house forsaken goes fast to ruin, so this state, on being left to itself, was now to become the victim of that internal disorder, which either undermines society, or lays it open to the successful attacks of its enemies. Corruption of principles never fails to produce a depravity of manners, which, by spreading the moral contagion through the mass of the body politic, renders men at last insensible to all ideas of duty, and makes them the ready instruments of the ambitious and turbulent, who have no other motive than the gratification of their passions; and who are equally indifferent to the means or the consequences of their actions. Such was the character of the family who had been set apart from the rest of mankind, by the special favour of the Almighty, with laws and promises calculated to secure their own virtue, and to promote the happiness of their posterity. But societies, as well as individuals, have their allotted periods of probation, the length of which, as it increases the number of duties and the weight of obligation to the faithful discharge of them; so it aggravates the guilt of neglect, and will justly heighten the condemnation of those who abuse the mercies they have received. The time of trial with the Jews was now terminated; and as Divine grace continues to afford the opportunity of improvement to every man, till he seals his own condemnation by the obduracy of impenitence; so was it in the present instance, for our Lord prolonged his ministry till the combination of the priests and scribes against his life made it necessary for him to withdraw, both from the city and the temple; because it neither comported with the design of his mission, nor with

the declarations of prophecy, that he should suffer death in a private manner. The conspirators, therefore, were compelled to pursue their object by other means; and thereby, without intending any thing more than the indulgence of their malignity, in the destruction of one whom they hated, and the extinction of a party which they feared, these men contributed to the fulfillment of the sacred predictions, and to the diffusion of the Gospel among the Gentiles. From this time the Jewish system, so wonderfully constituted and graciously preserved, became desolate or a void waste, as to all vital purposes; and the history of this astonishing nation, for the short space of their political existence, presents a melancholy picture of a people, not only lost to all sense of virtue, but even so bereft of common prudence as to bring upon themselves swift destruction. Within half a century from this period, the capital of Judea fell into the hands of the Romans, after a siege of several months; during which the inhabitants suffered unparalled calamities, more through the cruelty and wickedness of their countrymen, who held the command of the place, than from the ordinary events of war or the ferocity of their invaders. Every circumstance predicted by our Lord, was literally fulfilled; and the temple, which was the glory of the kingdom, and an object of admiration to the disciples, became at last so completely a heap of ruins, that not one of its massy stones was left standing upon another. That the besiegers should dig a trench, and cast up a wall about the city, was perfectly agreeable to the tedious warfare of that age; but that, after the place was taken, they should engage in such a laborious and useless work as that of ploughing up the foundations of the ruined temple, would seem incredible, if the fact had not been attested by writers who were so far from having any purpose to answer by the rela-

tion, that if they had been aware of the testimony which was thus borne to the Christian religion, their prejudices would have either led them to suppress the truth, or to have observed an absolute silence on the subject. But so it is, that the best informed of the Jewish historians have, in their accounts of the fate of Jerusalem, mentioned in detail those striking particulars, which actually corresponded most minutely with the predictive description of our Lord. The revolutions which have overturned other states may generally be traced to some political causes, either in the internal character of the people or the nature of their connexions, the violence of their enemies or the peculiar circumstances of the times; but in the present case human sagacity would be perplexed to account for the infatuation of the Jews in provoking such an unequal contest, and in persevering so obstinately in the defence of a place which was without the means of subsistence to an increased population, and which had not the least prospect of relief from any other quarter. An insurrection so extraordinary, in the mild reign of Vespasian, and when Judæa had been for above a century subject to the Roman power, can be attributed to nothing but that madness which, even in the opinion of a heathen moralist, prepares the wicked for the sword of justice. That which occasioned the ruin of this people, was their impiety; and it was so apparent, that the very conqueror who subdued them, regarded himself in no other light than as the instrument in the hand of Heaven for their punishment. Having renounced their God and Saviour, it was but just that he should leave them to their own devices; for "as righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death." Prov. xi. 19.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE SECOND ADVENT.

Mark, xiii. 32.—*But of that day and that hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*

IN the valedictory discourse of our Saviour to the Jews, he denounced the extinction of their state under the figure of a mansion abandoned by its owner; but to this sentence he added the declaration, "I say unto you, that ye shall not see me from henceforth, till ye say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." These words have been strangely understood to signify the visitation of Jerusalem; but to this forced interpretation there are insurmountable objections, for the coming here spoken of, is not to occur till after the desolation of Judea; and it is besides characterized as a return on the obedience of the people who had been long forsaken. The phrase of the coming of the Lord cannot, with propriety, be applied to the breaking up of this nation by the Romans; and it is a violent perversion of language to describe the tremendous revolution occasioned by their arms, as a benediction. It was in all respects the scourge of Providence, for unparalleled impiety; but even to the present day, neither that calamity nor the consequent troubles and dispersions of Israel have awakened the infatuated people to the true cause of their misery, or inclined them to seek, in a penitential spirit, for "the Lord their God, and David their king." Hos. iii. 5. Such a conversion, however, is plainly foretold in many parts of the prophetic books; and it is obviously alluded to in the declaration made by our blessed Lord, when he quitted the temple for the last time. On retiring

from thence to the mount of Olives, four of the disciples, who still pondered upon what they had heard, came to the place where he sat, and asked him privately, "Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" These apostles, in common with their brethren, were still impressed with the idea, that the throne of the Messiah was to be established upon earth, with circumstances of unusual splendour in their days. As therefore they gathered from what their Lord had asserted, that he would not come again while the temple stood, they wished to be apprized of those signs which should precede its demolition, and be made acquainted also with the exact period of that advent, from which they promised themselves the greatest blessings. In reply to these distinct inquiries, the Divine Instructor delivered a predictive discourse, of considerable length; the first part of which is descriptive of the evils about to fall upon Judea, within the compass of that particular age or generation. The indications of that catastrophe are laid down with remarkable precision; and they were literally verified when the Mosaic economy came to an end, and the chosen family were scattered abroad upon the face of the earth, in which dispersed state they shall continue till the time of their tribulation shall be completed. This was only the beginning of a long period, in which the Jewish people must remain as the marked memorial of the Divine judgment, "without a king or legitimate government, and without a sacrifice;" yet preserved for great and gracious purposes until the time of the end, the knowledge of which is reserved in the secret counsels of the Most High. The tribulation of those days is not to be understood of the siege of Jerusalem or the ravages of Judea, but extends to the whole period during which the seed of Jacob shall wander

in the darkness of infidelity ; while, by a very remarkable peculiarity, they are kept free from idolatry and imposture. Though blinded by prejudice and borne down by oppression, this people have neither yielded to Pagan superstition nor Mohammedan licentiousness ; but with all their errors and obduracy, they have resisted the temptation to apostasy, and are still a distinct race, both in name and profession, from the rest of the world. The time of their judgment will continue in an equal degree with the probation of the Gentiles ; and when that is fulfilled, Israel shall be gathered with them into one fold, and under one Shepherd. It is to this great event our Lord refers in the remarkable observation, " Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." This was an answer to the impatient inquiry of the Apostles, who wanted particular information concerning the exact time and the determinate signs of their Master's appearance in regal grandeur. The progressive marks of his second coming he condescended to state, for their edification and that of the church ; but beyond the knowledge to be acquired from these appearances, in the moral and natural world, neither the Apostles nor any other men were to be made acquainted. Knowledge, in this place, is to be taken in a very different sense from simple perception or absolute prescience, and must be considered with a particular regard to the object of our Lord's ministry, which was to reveal the will of God to mankind, and to make by his suffering a full satisfaction for the sins of the world. The Redeemer himself had a prescribed sphere of action in which he was to move, and certain determinate laws to which he was subject ; hence he grew up to manhood with a gradual expansion of his intellectual faculties, and an improvement of his moral powers ; he felt the common infirmities of our nature, and he endured all

the temptations that the adversary could devise to shake his integrity. The space of time in which he officiated, is emphatically called his day; and he speaks of the necessity that lay upon him of doing in it all the works for which he was sent into the world. Conformably, therefore, with this character of a divine messenger, he speaks of his second manifestation as a secret known only to the mind of the Eternal Father, and forming no part of that dispensation which the Son was authorized to reveal, in any other way than by representing the successive signs that should announce its approach. This concealment is an equal proof of wisdom and benevolence; for the signs being made to grow out of the circumstances of the times, will confirm the truth of revelation as this growing evidence unfolds itself, to the comfort of the believer and the confusion of the infidel, the recovery of the wanderer and the condemnation of the wicked.

The budding of the fig-tree is not a plainer indication of the summer than the autumnal gathering, than the destruction of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, are of the coming of the Son of Man. The two first of these signs have already occurred, and the other is so considerably advanced as to promise that greater fulfilment which shall usher in the restoration of the ancient people of God. Here then we have a more powerful incitement to diligence and piety, to the labour of love and the study of the Scriptures, than could have been derived from a more defined account of the precise era, when the church shall finish her militant course and commence her state of glory; "Watch, therefore, for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come."

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Matt. xxv. 46.—*These shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal.*

WITH these awful words our Lord concludes his prophetic discourse, which may be said to comprehend the history of his mediatorial kingdom, from the period of his suffering to the consummation of all things. The certainty of his coming to judge the world, and the obscurity attending the time when that event will come to pass, are designed to keep the minds of believers in a state of watchfulness, and to set them upon a diligent use of all the means that may be offered them of advancing the Redeemer's glory. It merits serious observation, that in the tremendous description here given of the end of the world, the sin of sloth and negligence is represented as bringing upon men the heaviest condemnation. This, however, will be the leading characteristic of that age, when the signs of the times shall indicate most strongly the great harvest, and when all the probationary dispensations of grace shall terminate for ever. After a season of licentiousness and persecution, predicted in the parable of the unrighteous steward, who gave himself up to sensual indulgence, and a tyrannical abuse of his situation ; a period of indifference succeeds, which is represented by the scene of a virgin train appointed to wait with their lamps trimmed and burning, for the appearance of the bridegroom. Five of these damsels, it is said, were wise, and took additional oil with them in their vessels ; while the others, thinking that the bridal procession would be speedy, were contented with

what they had in their lamps. The event showed the necessity of the measure which the prudent virgins had adopted; for, while the bridegroom tarried longer than was at first expected, they all slumbered and slept. So long as men are in this world, they will be affected by its cares; and in one respect the same lot happens both to the wise and the simple, the righteous and the wicked. But these foolish virgins are not described as being dissolute characters; on the contrary, they made a profession of religion, and at first were all life and zeal in the service of their Lord. To appearance, then, they were objects of admiration as much as their companions; but when the midnight cry roused them from their slumber, the one had lamps which they could not relume, and the others were provided with no more oil than would serve for their own use. While, therefore, these last joyfully entered the palace of the great king, the gates were closed upon the thoughtless virgins, who had to lament their carelessness when it was too late to be remedied, and when their prayers for admittance were rejected with this sentence, "I know you not." In the fate of these virgins, churches and individuals may learn, that a sound faith and the forms of piety will be of no avail where grace is wanting, and that if the knowledge of redemption is not carried into practice, it will only serve to aggravate the condemnation of those who possessed it, when the Saviour shall come in person to enquire how it has been applied. The same truth is taught in the parable of the talents which a wealthy man delivered in different proportions to his servants, that they might trade with the same during his absence. When the lord of these domestics returned, it appeared that those who had the greatest burden were the most diligent, and that the person to whom only the care of one talent was entrusted, had been so idle and ungrateful as to bury

it in a napkin, instead of turning it to the advantage of the owner. This man thought he acted a very honest part in securing the talent, and delivering it back in the same state that he received it; but his lord, in passing judgment upon him, declared, that the qualification which had been imparted to him was intended for general purposes; and that in neglecting to improve what was so freely bestowed, he had incurred the doom justly due to all who had violated their duty. In both these cases we see that the offending parties were not charged with enormous crimes, nor even with infidelity and profaneness; for the virgins were at their post before the gate of the palace, with their lamps in their hands; and the unprofitable servant continued in his master's house, with all the outward marks of fidelity. In the sight of men they might seem to be attentive and prudent, assiduous and diligent, in their respective stations, yet when the trial came they were found deficient; and thus we learn that the semblance of piety, without the power of it in the mind and conversation, is no less odious to Infinite Holiness than positive vice and irreligion. To the same effect the judicial proceedings of the last day are described as turning wholly upon the active services of the faithful, and the negligences of the slothful; the one being called to bliss by an approbation of their pious exercises, and the others cast into outer darkness for having omitted to do good in their generation. Thus the righteousness of the saints will be made manifest by the Judge of all the earth, who remembers those labours of love to which the humble believer himself is far from ascribing any virtue; and thus again will the hollow professors of religion be condemned, when the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, and the whole human family shall be arranged on the right and left of the Throne, according to their real, and not their assumed characters.

In one of these divisions, and be it observed that they are but two, it will be the lot of every human being to stand enrolled; and as his portion then shall be, his condition will be for ever. The characters are not more directly opposed to each other than the situations to which they are allotted, and the duration of their respective states; "for it is no less certain that the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, than it is that the righteous will enter upon life eternal." There is no efficacious repentance beyond the present state; for in the interval between death and the resurrection, the blessed rest in joyful security, while the impenitent remain in dismal apprehension; but the moral character of each is fixed for ever. In this condition they are found at the retribution of the last day; and then the joy of the one shall be converted into the fruition of bliss, and the fears of the other sealed up in the gloom of everlasting despair. Such is the account which the Saviour of sinners hath given of the issue of that day, when "all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." John, v. 28, 29.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE TREACHERY OF JUDAS.

Matt. xxvi. 16.—*And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*

PAINFUL as it is to contemplate the characters of those who have acquired a sad distinction among men by their crimes, such subjects are so far from being unprofitable, that they set forth in strong co-

lours the depravity of the human heart, when it ceases to be influenced by religious principles. Hence it is that we read in the Sacred History so many instances of bad men, whose conduct is given in detail, that we may learn to avoid those errors which led them into destructive courses, and to examine our own tempers, habits, and inclinations, lest we fall, like them, into the snare of the tempter. Whatever progress man may have made in knowledge or civilization, his nature is the same; and when we read the black transactions of ages past, we shall be at no loss in tracing the causes of them to those sources which have produced similar offences in our own times. Even the case of Judas, though we are accustomed to regard his conduct with detestation, is not so very peculiar, or removed from the ordinary description of vices, as many are apt to imagine. There is every reason to believe that this man was an early follower of Jesus; and certain it is, that he was admitted to no small share of his Master's confidence; for on being advanced to the apostolic dignity, he held the office of steward to the company. This appointment appears to have unfolded his disposition; for, according to the testimony of one who knew him well, he was in the practice of filching from what was provided for the common convenience. Here, then, it becomes a question, how a man of such sordid habits could attach himself to the person of One who had not where to lay his head; or how, on the other hand, the Redeemer came to admit an avaricious wretch of this description into the number of his associates. The answer to these inquiries is easy; for the motive of Judas in following our Lord was interested, and he expected, in common with his brethren, to enjoy great riches and high distinction in the Messiah's kingdom. The situation which was assigned him encouraged these ideas, and hence he adhered to the

service of Jesus as long as he thought that there was any thing to be gained by it, or that there remained any prospect of our Saviour's asserting his claim to the throne of Israel, in that carnal sense which was the prevailing delusion of the times. . But base as Judas showed himself, it does not appear that he was uniformly of this vicious character; on the contrary, he went out with the rest of the Apostles, and performed those wonders which belonged to the Divine commission; he preached the Gospel and wrought miracles; he left all to follow Jesus, and for some time his reputation must have been great among his companions. The bag was that which first brought the corruptions of his heart into exercise, and proved the ruin of his morals and his faith. He first began by petty shifts and mean artifices to cover his fraudulent practices; and so intent was he to gain a private stock out of the public property, that he could not help finding fault with the gratitude of Mary, when she anointed the feet of our Lord and wiped them with her hair. The objection of Judas to this action arose from his selfishness, though he pretended to be actuated by the principle of benevolence. He estimated exactly the value of the perfume, and then made a discourse upon the charitable uses to which the produce might have been applied. The reasoning of the man was plausible, and his motives appeared to be commendable; but our Lord, in reply, made it evident that there are different duties which it becomes the believer to perform; and an Evangelist, who was well acquainted with the evil habits of Judas, makes this strong remark on his language; "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." Such was the character of this Apostle, who in the midst of his wickedness made a profession of religion, and no doubt he had a sincere belief in the divine authority

of his Master. But filthy lucre contaminated his mind ; and by indulgence he became so completely the slave of avarice as to sell his conscience for the sum of about four pounds. That a person of this grovelling temper should be employed in a place of trust about the person of our Lord, may seem strange ; but by this appointment many important purposes were answered. Judas, from his situation, was thoroughly acquainted with the life and conversation of Jesus ; and therefore, when the traitor made his infamous offer to the Sanhedrim, every attempt, no doubt, was made to obtain from him such information as might turn to the disadvantage of one whom the council were at that time plotting to destroy. Yet Judas, inflamed as he was by resentment and embittered by disappointment, gave no intelligence upon which any charge of sedition or imposture could be framed. All that he did was to betray his Lord into the hands of his enemies, under the shade of night, and after much deliberate thought with himself concerning the safest method of accomplishing the abominable contract which he had made with the chief priests. But when the deed was done the traitor repented ; being smitten with horror at the enormity of his guilt, and having returned the wages of iniquity to the purchasers of blood, he “ departed to his own place.” This was the unhappy end of Judas, after enjoying the most extraordinary privileges and receiving many warnings, an attention to which might have kept him from that gulph of misery into which he fell. It was indeed necessary that the Redeemer should be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, and become a public spectacle upon the cross ; but no compulsion was laid upon the wills of those who were the agents in this transaction. Each of these acted according to his own passions ; and thus the covetousness of Judas, the bigotry of Caiaphas, and the cowardice of Pilate, co-operated

with the malice of the Pharisees and the prejudices of the people, in bringing about the secret purposes of God. This was the argument of our Lord himself, upon the treachery of his disciple and the consequences to which it led, "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had never been born."

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE LAST SUPPER.

Luke, xxii. 19, 20.—*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*

OUR Divine Master having finished the paschal supper with his disciples, that he might fulfill all righteousness, proceeded to establish a new institution in the room of that typical service, and as a perpetual commemoration of the great oblation which was about to be offered for the sins of the world. What he now did was a symbolical representation of that sacrifice, and a pledge of redemption to those who faithfully partook of it; the bread being the figure of his body, as the cup was of that mingled stream which issued from his wounded side. The church now assembled under her Divine Head, like Israel in Egypt, on the night of deliverance, was indeed ignorant of the purport of these mysteries at the time of their celebration; but when she welcomed her risen Lord, and knew that he had completely triumphed over hell and the grave, it was a source of

joy to every believer that he had thus an opportunity of showing forth his Lord's death, and of feasting upon that sacrifice which was expressed under the emblems of bread broken and wine poured out. The command of our Lord was peremptory and universal, binding all his followers to the observance of this institute, which was to supersede the passover, and to become the perpetual memorial of his dying love. To suppose that the great Teacher of wisdom and Exemplar of perfection would so solemnly, and with such particular circumstances, ordain a rite merely for the use of the persons who had the benefit of his ministry, would be to trifle with the majesty of his character, and to deprive the ceremony itself of all signification. There could be no remembrance of Christ or his sufferings, in which the Apostles and their successors were more interested than the faithful of every age. So far from it, we may safely pronounce, that as years rolled on from the commencement of the church and the ascension of her Lord, the necessity of this commemoration of his sacrifice became more urgent, and even obligatory. In the apostolic age believers had a nearer access to the eye-witnesses of the facts recorded in the Gospels, and they possessed also the advantages of those miraculous gifts which were poured copiously out for the benefit of the infant church; but when those blessings ceased, and the most pernicious errors arose, followed by a correspondent licentiousness of manners, the importance of this sacrament, as a security of religious principles, was evident. In attending upon the holy Eucharist, the worshipper, if he has a proper sense of the service, finds himself drawn into the presence of his God and Saviour, by the atoning efficacy of whose blood he obtains "the remission of his sins." Matt. xxvi. 28. This consideration will beget in the pious mind a deep abhorrence of that iniquity which

brought the Son of God from the height of his glory, that he might accomplish for man a perfect righteousness, by the unspotted holiness of his life, and the infinite merit of his sufferings. Thus, while we derive pardon and sanctification through these elements, our souls are raised above the cares of the world, strengthened against the snares of the tempter, and preserved from that pernicious delusion which would, under the pretence of simplicity, reduce the Saviour to an inferior station, and deprive his last solemn institution of all virtue. But we have not so learned Christ; and therefore, leaving the husks of an unprofitable speculation to those who are contented with regarding this ordinance as a moral memorial only, we behold in it the Word made flesh, that we, through his humiliation, might be made partakers of eternal life; for such is his own declaration, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." John, vi. 57.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST.

John, xiii. 15.—*For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

THE wish of the ancient sage, that Divine Wisdom would become embodied and descend upon earth, for the instruction of mankind in the love and practice of virtue, was fully realized when the Son of God appeared in human nature, to guide us into the way of truth by his doctrine and example. The precepts of this heavenly Teacher were recommended by the purity of his conversation, and illustrated by actions familiar to the plainest understanding. He not only

enforced the principles of morality by sanctions drawn from an equal Providence and a future judgment, but he showed the spirit of what he inculcated in his own amiable temper, and he condescended to exhibit the effects of his rules in the various branches of duty to which they applied. Thus at the termination of his eventful course he gave his followers a striking lesson of humility, which was rendered necessary by their recent behaviour and the circumstances in which they were about to be placed. Though our Lord had repeatedly signified that he must endure the severest hardships, and be persecuted to the last extremity by the Jewish rulers, the disciples, to whom he had communicated particular information concerning the nature and extent of his sufferings, either would not understand him in a literal sense, or else they flattered themselves that all this would as quickly be succeeded by a triumphant display of their Master's power in the establishment of that throne which was the great object of their expectation. Hence we find them making the kingdom of the Messiah the frequent theme of their discourse; and having formed wrong notions of that dominion, it is no wonder that dissensions arose among them concerning their share in the administration. Even at the last passover, when they were assured that their Lord was on the eve of undergoing the bitterest afflictions, the Apostles still continued these disputes, from which they were not restrained by the presence of their Master, or his pathetic exhortations to humility and concord. The festal table where he presided was not free from the acrimonious spirit, which broke out with such violence, that our Lord, to allay the strife, and turn the whole to an edifying purpose, adopted an expedient which was powerfully calculated to shame the disputants into moderation, and to afford them a memorable lesson for their future conduct. Laying

aside his upper garments, and arraying himself as a menial servant of the lowest order, he took water in a basin, and began to wash the feet of his disciples where they sat. From the reply to Peter, who objected to this degradation of his Master, the symbolical meaning of the ceremony is obvious; for, said our Lord, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me;" which words, as they imply the necessity of a union with Christ for redemption, so they prove no less clearly that we are indebted for sanctification, as well as justification, to the merits of the Saviour, without whose grace we can do nothing. The moral drawn by himself from what he did to his disciples was this, that all who are called by his name must be ever ready to perform similar acts of love towards their brethren, and not be deterred from such services by the opinion of the world, or disgusted at the mean condition of the objects. He that attains to this spirit of Christian humility will be the highest in the kingdom of God; but then, as our Lord said to his impetuous Apostle, this cannot be acquired till the mind is purified by the influence of Divine grace. In proportion as this prevails over the will and affections, the believer is active in the discharge of every duty, not excepting even the most servile offices of benevolence towards the members of Christ. He does not content himself with good wishes and exhortations, or even with extending his assistance to the distressed when they come in his way; but he is instant in season and out of season in the work of charity, seeking occasions in which he may be useful to the needy, endeavouring to reconcile differences among brethren, to convert the sinner from the error of his ways, to bring up the young in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to promote by every means in his power the spiritual as well as temporal welfare of his fellow-creatures. Though the believer is ready to contend for the faith once

delivered to the saints, and is jealous in all respects of his Master's honour, his fortitude is blended with meekness, and he ministers even rebuke with kindness. He neither yields any part of the truth out of an affected liberality of sentiment, nor officiously obtrudes his particular opinions upon the attention of the world, as the dictates of superior judgment. Humility is his governing principle, and the life of the blessed Jesus his constant model; in imitation of whom he studies the Divine will in all things, and labours in his sphere to promote the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: with this view he watches carefully his thoughts as well as his actions; and instead of despising others or censuring their imperfections, he endeavours to profit by what appears commendable in their characters, according to the apostolical advice, "In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves." Phil. ii. 3.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE CONFIDENCE OF PETER.

Mark, xiv. 31.—*But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.*

THE blessed effects of the Gospel were conspicuous in the change produced on the minds and deportment of the disciples, who, from being eager and ambitious, became so meek and humble, after the departure of their Lord, as to publish their faults and to record their errors. All the Evangelists have minutely related the disputes which prevailed among the Apostles respecting their claims to pre-eminence, and they have also given a circumstantial account of the zealous declaration of Peter, that on no account

whatever would he desert his Master. In this he was joined by all his brethren, who were eager to profess their fidelity when they heard that one of them should betray his Lord, and that all would forsake him in the time of his trouble. Now, had these men been deceivers, they never would have related facts of this nature; for if no such prediction was delivered as that which the four historians have concurred in reporting, it is impossible to account for a narrative, the obvious tendency of which was to lessen instead of exalting the character of the persons who made it. Many, indeed, will readily acknowledge their imperfections, and candidly avow the mistakes into which they have fallen; but no one who is engaged in promoting a fraudulent scheme will state particulars connected with it which prove his own weakness and want of fortitude. Many reasons might have been alleged for the suppression of these private conversations, but none could be offered for the invention of them; and the Apostles must indeed have been worse than mad to draw such a degrading picture of themselves as they have uniformly done, for no other purpose than that of bringing themselves into trouble, and exalting the character of One in whose service they were sure of experiencing nothing but poverty and persecution. But so far were they from setting forth their virtues to advantage, or dwelling upon their labours in the cause of truth, that, on the contrary, they took most pains, if we may so speak, to bring to remembrance those parts of their conduct of which ordinary prudence would have advised the concealment. This is at once a decisive proof of their faithfulness, and of the inspiration of the records in which these instances are so minutely detailed, as show the insufficiency of all natural means and human instruments to devise and propagate a religion which arose not in a dark age or in a barbarous country, but made its way

among the most enlightened nations, though opposed by priests and philosophers, rulers and people. When, therefore, we contemplate the astonishing progress which Christianity made in a few years by the preaching of these unlettered men, and turn to observe the behaviour of those very persons on the eve of the sad catastrophe which deprived them for a season of their Divine Instructor, it is impossible to hesitate on the question; whether this was the power of God. The disciples would not believe that they could be so wanting in fortitude and affection as to abandon their Master in his distress; and Peter, who was always more vehement than his companions, was quite sure, that, so far from being offended at the wretched condition of One whom he sincerely loved, he would even lay down his life for the sake of Jesus. But our Lord, who knew what was in man, and all the secret workings of the human heart, gave the eager Apostle to understand that his defection would be even more aggravated in its guilt than that of his associates. Even this information was far from abating the confidence of Peter, who had so strong a reliance upon his own firmness and integrity, that he ventured to set up his resolution in contradiction to the plain declaration of One whose omniscience he had witnessed on several occasions. But this is the common infirmity of man, who flatters himself that he is able, by his own strength, to resist temptations and to overcome difficulties, to endure sacrifices and to accomplish resolutions. Instead of deriving caution from the fall of others, he consoles himself that his own principles are fixed, and his determination so firm, that he cannot be moved; being little aware, that though he may not come precisely into the same snare which has deceived many, there are numerous devices by which in an unguarded moment he may be drawn aside from the path of righteousness. We are in fact never so liable to

fall by the corruptions of the evil one as when we think ourselves most secure from his delusions; and that insidious spirit is always making the greatest progress in our hearts when he appears to be the farthest from us. Peter and his brethren spoke with perfect sincerity when they professed their attachment to Jesus; but their error lay in trusting to their fortitude and feelings, instead of praying for Divine aid to keep them from temptation in the approaching conflict. This, then, was the principal reason why the errors of the disciples are so minutely narrated in the Sacred History, teaching us from their example to watch continually over our thoughts, and to pray incessantly for that grace which can alone preserve us from the designs of the enemy, who is continually employed in preventing our improvement and alluring us into the deceitfulness of sin. A pious martyr of our own nation was wont, on seeing any notorious malefactor conveyed to the place of execution, to say, that nothing but the Divine goodness kept him from the same crimes and the same fate. To this conclusion the holy man was led by a close examination of his heart; and were we to examine our own with equal diligence and impartiality, we should be disposed to imitate his great humility and tenderness. Let us then attend carefully to the counsel of our Lord, who well knew the weakness of our nature and the power of our adversary, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matt. xxvi. 41. It becomes us to be zealously affected in a good thing; but this energy will neither be lasting nor beneficial, if it is mixed with any selfish principle. Such a fervour as arises from natural temperament will sink into indifference, or involve us by imprudence and presumption in many difficulties; "wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. 12.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE MANSIONS OF BLISS.

John, xiv. 2.—*I go to prepare a place for you.*

WHEN the son of perdition was gone to earn the wages of iniquity, our blessed Lord proceeded to console the eleven loyal disciples with the most gracious promises of Divine support in their arduous labour, and the assurance that their fidelity should be suitably rewarded in the kingdom of glory. They were greatly dismayed by what they had heard concerning the approaching departure of their Master, and the declaration, that not only one of their most intimate companions would be chiefly instrumental in this calamity, but that all of them would be seized with such consternation as to abandon their Friend in his distress. The kind and sympathizing spirit of Jesus was touched by the gloom of sorrow which his discourse had occasioned in the minds of those whom he loved for their sincerity, and whose weakness he pitied as the infirmity of the flesh. He knew that they had a true reverence for his person, and that their piety was unfeigned; though mixed with many imperfections; on which account he turned their attention from the consideration of his sufferings to the consequences which should be the result of them, in bringing life and immortality to light. That the disciples were till now unsettled in the great doctrine of a future state, is not to be supposed; and yet the chief argument for their support consists in the confirmation of that article, as if they had stood in need of being strengthened in the belief of it. But in this our Saviour discovered his intimate acquaintance with human nature, which in the time of difficulty and trouble must be directed and relieved

by tried principles. It is useless to think of amusing the afflicted by speculations upon the necessity of submission to the Divine will, and of the value of fortitude, when the mind is agitated between the privation of positive blessings and the uncertainty of what is to come. That it may be enabled to endure pain or to suffer loss, it must have a certain rule by which to judge of its duty, and some assurance to bear it up stedfastly, amidst the ills of life and the temptations which never fail to obtrude themselves most upon our thoughts when we are the least qualified for resistance. Our Lord, therefore, while he showed that his hour was now come, and that the period of his ministry was drawn to its close, plainly informed his disciples that his departure, painful as it must be, was more expedient for them than for himself, since he was now going to prepare a place for them in that world of which they had at present but very inadequate conceptions. This state of felicity he describes as a royal palace of vast dimensions, in which are numerous apartments, suited to the characters of those who shall be found worthy of admission to the Divine presence. "In my Father's house are many mansions," or various stations; all of them abounding with happiness, though differing in the degrees of honour and enjoyment. In these seats of bliss, believers of all ages and countries shall be accommodated according to their several capacities, and the nature of their previous habits and connexions; for the Church above, like that below, is a society in which are perfected those relations which were begun upon earth. The great Head and Redeemer of this spiritual community describes its condition, hereafter, as an immense family assembled and ranged in one house, where he allots the members their respective places and destinations. The beauty of this illustration is heightened by its familiarity, and the circumstances attending all the faith-

ful while they are in the wilderness; for here, like the patriarchs of old, we sojourn in tents, and have no abiding city, but are continually "seeking one to come, whose builder and maker is God." Heb. xi. 10. Such was the consolation which the disciples received from their dying Lord, as a motive to resignation and mutual love, an unremitted attention to their duty, and to that entire faith in him which could alone give them the victory over the world. But what was delivered to the eleven Apostles, that they might be comforted under the sharp trial that was now coming upon them, is recorded also for our benefit in the view of approaching mortality, or in weeping over the remains of departed friends. Amidst all the changes and chances of this transitory life, there is a voice which calls us to prepare for another habitation, and quickens us forward from the vale of trouble and vanity through which we are passing, by the promise of rest and glory when our warfare shall be accomplished. "Arise, therefore, and let us go hence."

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

UNION WITH CHRIST.

John, xv. 5.—*I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.*

It was customary with our Divine Teacher to collect matter of instruction from the objects around him, and to illustrate the mysteries of grace by allusions to the appearances of nature. Thus, after the paschal supper and the institution of the holy eucharist, he retired with his disciples to the Mount of

Olives, where, being seated among the vines, he took occasion, from the culture of those plants, to show the necessity of that faith which worketh by love. Here the Saviour of men represented himself as the tree of life, from whose salutary influence alone, the renewed mind derives that principle by which it is disposed to perform works acceptable in the sight of God. The morality which passes with the men of this world, is a matter of mere external show and of personal convenience, springing from human relations only, and therefore partaking of the imperfections natural to its origin. As it has no higher motive than the gratification of some present desire, or the attainment of a distant good, it terminates with the animal existence to which it has contributed pleasure and advantage. The case is far different with the Christian virtue, which being of immortal growth and of secret but powerful operation, renders one branch of the spiritual body efficacious to the improvement of the rest; and thus, while the several members are strengthened in faith and increasing their own joy, they contribute to the edification and comfort of the whole community. The meanest disciples, therefore, have no reason to despond on account of their apparent insignificance, or to complain of their weakness; for all such may be assured, that the uneasiness which they feel is a convincing evidence that the divine life in them is much stronger than what their fears will allow; and that, while they are thus aspiring after more fruitfulness, they are neither unprofitable in themselves nor disregarded by the great Householder. In whatever estimation the poor and obscure branches of the Christian family may be held by their brethren, or how abject soever they are in their own eyes, the time is coming when their labours of love shall be brought forth to public view, with all the blessed

effects that have been produced by them, but of which the faithful themselves have no remembrance or conception. In the visible plantation of the church there must unavoidably be a diversity of gifts and characters, as well as of orders and conditions; but that grace by which men are enabled to discharge their duties, public and private, as the members of this community, they receive from Him "who of God is made unto all his people wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." 1 Cor. i. 30. Union with Christ, then, is not, as some vain expositors pretend, a metaphorical description or an enthusiastic dream, but an eternal principle which, unless it be begun in this life, can never take place in another. Where this prevails in the will and affections, there the love of God is perfected in an abhorrence of sin, and the cultivation of every virtue by which our Divine Exemplar was himself distinguished, and which he expects from all who are called by his name. Our Lord, in the imagery which he adopted to set forth the nature of a living faith, most expressly condemned that delusion, which, in after-ages, arose like a gangrene in his church, to the destruction of true piety, by resolving all religion into the inward persuasion of an interest in redemption, secured to the believer by an absolute decree. Here, on the contrary, we learn that our perseverance is conditional, and that no longer than while we make a due return for the grace communicated, shall we be accounted as branches of the true vine. We can do nothing indeed without Divine assistance; but, then, that gift which the Saviour bestows upon us may be wasted to unprofitable purposes, or it may be neglected till the opportunity of improvement and of an appropriation to a beneficial use is passed away. Let us then attend diligently to all the means by which our minds may be strengthened and directed in the way of holiness;

“for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James, ii. 26.

NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-NINTH.

SPIRITUAL PEACE.

John, xvi. 33.—*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace: in the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

THE last discourses which the blessed Jesus delivered to his followers before his passion, were remarkable for closeness of argument and a solemn dignity of sentiment, energetic exhortation, and elevated diction. When we consider that he was now on the verge of becoming the scorn of the wicked, and an object of bitter persecution, our admiration of his fortitude will be raised to a higher degree of astonishment at the majesty of his language, and the affectionate reverence in which he was still regarded by his auditors. These plain and unlettered men continued to hold fast their integrity and to preserve their attachment, even in the dark hour when they knew that their Lord was to be taken from them, and that they should be exposed, in consequence of their connexion with him, to the vengeance of his enemies, whose power was as formidable as their malice was inveterate. The eleven faithful Apostles might have sought their own personal safety at this time, and have withdrawn to their respective habitations, on finding that the hopes which they had so long indulged were no longer to be realized; and this they would have done, had there been any thing in his deportment and conversation to warrant their defection. The very disappointment which they

had already experienced was sufficient, according to the maxims of worldly prudence, to have furnished an excuse for leaving One to whom they could render no assistance in his distress. There have been indeed some extraordinary instances of friendship, where men have made a complete sacrifice of their personal ease and comforts for the benefit of those whom they loved; but the relation in which the disciples stood to our Saviour, was of a particular kind, and formed upon the idea of his being the restorer of Israel. When, therefore, every thing ran the contrary way to their expectations, they could have no farther inducement to continue in an attachment to a cause which was now to all appearance hopeless. So far, indeed, from having any natural motive for preserving their alliance to a suffering Saviour, they might have alleged many reasons for leaving him in this crisis, such as their own poverty and the wretchedness of their families, the miseries which awaited them, and their utter inability to be of any farther service to a person whom they respected for his virtues, but who, according to his own account, was about to be cut off from the land of the living by a painful and an ignominious death. Yet we find the Apostles still adhering to their Master amidst these accumulated evils, and with the most dismal prospect before them; for though they fled in the moment of surprize, they afterwards reassembled in Jerusalem, and showed their veneration for the memory of Jesus by their love to one another. This must have arisen from some principle common to them all, and superior to the mere conviction of the innocence of their Master, and of the purity of his doctrine. To the illumination of the Holy Spirit they were as yet strangers, with the exception of the promise of it for their support and guidance at a future day, in the conversion of the heathen world to the knowledge of the truth. We must seek then for some other

cause of this attachment to Jesus, at a time when he was in the deepest affliction, and when they were beset with perils on account of their known connexion with him as his disciples. What this was, appears in the detail of the conversation which took place on the Mount of Olives, where the eleven were so struck with the discovery of their private musings, that they had no longer any hesitation or doubt concerning the divinity of their Lord. "Now are we sure," said they, "that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God." On attaining to the faith which produced this confession, the disciples were made partakers of that peace which passeth all understanding. Their minds were enlightened and strengthened by the full conviction, that they were allied to One who, whatever might be his outward circumstances, was possessed of infinite knowledge. The confidence inspired by this persuasion raised them above the world, and kept them steadfast in their profession, though it did not free them from the infirmities of their nature. That peace which faith in Christ procured them, was the happy assurance that they were reconciled unto God, through the righteousness of the Mediator, by whose grace they were called, and to whose service they were devoted. Nothing short of a full belief in the divinity of their Lord could have given these men that tranquillity and boldness to which they were exhorted, and which they actually manifested when all their hopes seemed buried in the tomb of Jesus. Even at that affecting period they discovered a firmness which philosophy could not have imparted, and which must have resulted from a perfect conviction of the rectitude of their cause, and from the supporting influence of a divine principle in their hearts. Instead of stealing secretly out of Jerusalem and returning to their old employments

in Galilee, they abode still in the capital and its vicinity, consorting together with mutual kindness and a devout remembrance of their beloved Master. It is true, they kept these meetings secret for fear of the Jews; but they did not forsake each other, as men abandoned to despair and covered with disgrace would have done. The union of the disciples, therefore, in such circumstances, was a proof of the excellence of that faith which governed their minds, and afforded them peace of conscience and a reliance upon God in the midst of their trouble. Such was the integrity of the Apostles, and their unshaken love to Jesus even after his crucifixion; nor was this extraordinary virtue peculiar to them, for even the very women also were animated by the same spirit. Though weak by nature, and comparatively simple in understanding, they were yet strong in faith; and thus they became glorious witnesses of the power of truth. The same grace which supported them still operates in the children of light, who live without fear in the midst of a perverse generation; and while the world treats them with contempt or severity, on account of their profession, they can say with the Apostle, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." 2 Cor. i. 5. Here shines forth the glory of the Gospel, to the utter confusion of all gainsayers and the comfort of believers, in that it enables the meanest proficient in the school of faith to bear affliction, not merely with silent submission, but with thankfulness, as tending to correct the evil of his heart, to wean him from the world, and to bring him into a near conformity to his divine Master, "rejoicing, as the Apostles did, in being accounted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Acts, v. 41.

NOVEMBER THE THIRTIETH.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST.

John, xvii. 24.—*Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

THE leading features in our Lord's character were fortitude and tenderness, consisting of an unshaken resolution and an entire submission to the Divine will, the purest benignity towards the children of men, and an unwearied endeavour to promote their temporal and eternal welfare. At the close of his life these distinguished qualities shone forth with peculiar lustre, for he prepared himself with alacrity and steadiness to encounter the unparalleled sufferings which he was about to undergo as man's representative; and he devoted every moment in strengthening and edifying the minds of his followers. Having comforted them by exhortations and promises, in the view of his approaching departure, he presented them to the eternal Father in a most affecting and solemn address, the great object of which was to confirm the faith of his followers, by making them acquainted with the infinite virtue of his merits, and the prevailing power of his intercession on the behalf of all his people. The prayer which our Lord delivered a little before his agony is in fact an elaborate commentary on that comprehensive form of devotion, which he enjoined to be used in his church, and by every believer, to the end of time. Here we are taught that there is no access unto God as our Father, but by virtue of our union with Christ, from whom alone we can receive eternal life, and by

whose grace we are kept from the assaults and influence of the evil one. The design of the incarnation was to raise man to God, rather than to familiarize the Deity and his operations to human conceptions. When, therefore, the blessed Redeemer offered up these supplications to the eternal Throne, and made it his request to be reinstated in the possession of that glory which was suspended by his humiliation, he acted as our representative. On his own account he could stand in no need of any perfection; and though his ministry was now ended, yet he knew that his sufferings made an indispensable part of that work which he came into the world to discharge, as the price to be paid for the redemption of mankind. But it was not more necessary for him to fulfill all righteousness in his own person, than it was to instruct men in the due application of his merits and example, for their own particular benefit and the edification of their brethren. For this purpose he walked diligently in the way of the Divine commandments, that we might follow his steps; and in the same capacity, as our leader, he exercised private and social prayer, to show us the necessity of that holy duty and the spirit in which it should be performed. But we are to view the Saviour in a still higher character, as our merciful High-priest and Intercessor, opening to us the mediatorial kingdom, and rendering our services acceptable in the sight of God by the sanctifying influence of his perfect atonement. Thus we who were sometime afar off are brought near unto the Throne of Grace, where we receive the pardon of our sins through the sacrifice of Christ, and strength, which enables us to gain the victory over the world. Every believer is interested in the prayer which our Lord offered up for his church, in the most awful hour of his humiliation; because we have his own solemn assurance that he then interceded for all who should come to

the knowledge of the truth, through the testimony of the persons whom he had chosen as his witnesses. It becomes us, therefore, to examine the grounds of our faith with great care ; for unless we have an absolute reliance upon Christ as our surety, we shall have very inadequate notions of that salvation which he came into the world to accomplish. Without a deep sense of the malignity of that sin which defiles all our powers, we can have no idea of an infinite satisfaction being made for its expiation to Divine justice ; and therefore, so long as we are ignorant of ourselves, we shall neither see the necessity of a Mediator, nor be grateful to the Son of God for undertaking that office. But when conscience places the law in all its purity before the understanding, so that a man begins to find his own misery as a condemned sinner, and is convinced of his utter incapacity to perform exactly those duties which are required of him, the offer of a Saviour will be embraced by him with joyful fear and trembling hope. Instead of regarding the history of our Lord with mere admiration, the awakened mind is filled with affection towards him for his wonderful condescension, and esteems all the acts of his humiliation as so many parts of that mystery of godliness, for the revelation of which he was manifest in the flesh. Thus, when he prayed for every member of his church, he exhibited that upon earth which, as our advocate, he now performs in heaven, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us ; “ and this is the confidence that we have in him ; that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us : and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” 1 John, v. 14, 15.

DECEMBER THE FIRST.

THE AGONY OF CHRIST.

Luke, xxii. 44.—*And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

THERE is no circumstance in the history of our Saviour's passion more affecting than the relation of the wonderful scene which took place in the garden of Gethsemane, on the night of his apprehension. Every other particular in the awful tragedy may be comprehended by the plainest understanding, and is easily accounted for by the inveterate malice of his enemies, the excellence of his character, and the design of his sufferings; but of the bitter anguish which seized his soul after the intercessory prayer on the Mount of Olives, imagination endeavours in vain to form any adequate conception. Certain it is, however, that what he then endured made a necessary part of the humiliation which he was required to pass through as our representative; for in that sense alone could he be said to have "borne our griefs, to have carried our sorrows, and to have made his soul an offering for sin." *Is. liii. 4—10.* All the misery that afflicted him was of an expiatory nature, and this distress in the garden was peculiarly so; for here he was under no external constraint, neither had he as yet any bodily ills of which he could complain. His mind had been long familiarized to the manner of his death, and to the excruciating torments with which it should be attended; for he had repeatedly warned his disciples of the necessity he was under of visiting Jerusalem, that he might suffer what was decreed, and what the prophets had foretold. The dreadful pressure, therefore, of his spiritual faculties,

which forced the blood in concrete masses through the pores of his body, and causing it to fall like drops to the ground, could not have arisen from the apprehension of torments, for which he was already fully prepared. All these he sustained without murmuring when they came upon him, and neither the scourge that furrowed his tender limbs, the thorns which rent his temples, nor the irons which transfixed him to the cross, drew from his lips any expression of concern resembling what he uttered in prayer to his Father, when the ground was bedewed with his bloody sweat. This was an inward conflict and a mental struggle, under some uncommon heaviness, the nature of which cannot be understood, though the occasion of it is evidently to be sought in the vicarious character which our Lord assumed, as the surety of man and the willing victim to Divine justice, for the transgressions of the world. All that we have deserved as the punishment of our sins was borne to the utmost extent by the Son of God, who, in the language of the Apostle, "emptied himself, or became of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Philip. ii. 7. This passage, difficult as it appears, derives light from the mysterious transaction which is the subject of our present consideration; for at no period could the Saviour be so properly said to have emptied himself of his glory, as when the humanity was left to struggle beneath the judgment inflicted upon the sin of man agreeable to the sentence contained in the penal sanction of the covenant of works. The first Adam was created in the image of God, which he forfeited by his transgression in Paradise; the second Adam appeared in the likeness of men, that he might in our nature, and by his perfect obedience, recover that which was lost. As, therefore, it was the humanity that sinned, so was it the humanity that suffered both in the garden and

on the cross. This anguish, then, was evidently occasioned by the gradual quiescence or suspension of the Divinity in the person of Christ; and a faint idea of it may be formed by a consideration of that agony with which even the departure of the righteous is sometimes attended. But in the case of our Lord it was a voluntary degradation, and a generous submission to taste death for every man, when he might, if he had pleased, have abandoned the whole race of mankind to the consequences of their guilt. As he had all the sinless infirmities of our nature, he could not help feeling the horror of that separation by which his soul was left to bear alone the iniquities of men, and to make a full satisfaction for them. This will account for the amazement or consternation with which he was seized, the earnestness of his prayer, the convulsive agitation of his whole frame, and the appearance of the angel to strengthen him under all this accumulation of woes. Here then we behold the man Christ Jesus "truly made sin for us;" and though he had no turpitude of his own that required an atonement, yet he willingly exposed himself to the Divine wrath, according to the sentence denounced against the violation of the law, that we might be made righteous by his perfect obedience. His exquisite feelings and pathetic complaints were evidently produced by the sense of a positive loss then actually to be endured, rather than by the apprehension of corporeal sufferings, which he had already completely anticipated, and was prepared to encounter with patience and fortitude. But as this loss could be no diminution of the essential glory of the Son of God, the whole of it must have related to his assumed nature, in which he was made an offering for sin, being the Lamb slain according to the Divine decree from the foundation of the world. If we consider the extent of that misery in which the fall of our first parents involved us, we may in some

degree attain to a just sense of what was suffered by our gracious Substitute. The history of our ruin will give us an insight into the nature of our redemption; and as there we find that the extinction of the divine life was the doom of disobedience, so here we perceive that He who came to make us partakers of immortality was content to bear the whole punishment in our stead; and that we might be assured of his having done this to the fullest extent, all the particulars of his humiliation corresponded with the circumstances of the loss of Paradise. While, therefore, we are deeply affected by the narrative of these unparalleled sufferings, we should at the same time be filled with gratitude unto Him "who was in all things made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining unto God, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people; for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Heb. ii. 17, 18.

DECEMBER THE SECOND.

THE APPREHENSION OF JESUS.

John, xviii. 11.—*The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

AMONG the numerous proofs which the blessed Redeemer gave of his firmness and patience, his resolution and meekness, may be reckoned the manner in which he deported himself when he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies. It was usual with him to spend his evening hour of devotion in the garden of Gethsemane; and this practice was well known to the apostate disciple, who had often accompanied his Master to the spot. Our Lord did

not on that account either omit his custom, or change the place of his retirement; and even though he had it in his power to have departed before the arrival of the traitor with his band of armed ruffians, he was so far from taking any such precaution to provide for his safety, that he calmly awaited the approach of his persecutors. The severest language that fell from his lips on this occasion, was the remonstrance with which he received the villainous salute of his faithless Apostle: "Friend, wherefore art thou come? Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" At this very time he made it appear that his submission was purely a voluntary act, and that the force which came against him could do nothing without his own consent; for twice, at his bare word, did the whole body retreat, terrified at his majesty, and fall to the ground. That this display of Divine energy had no effect upon the minds of the conspirators may seem very extraordinary; but such is the nature of infidelity, that no evidences will subdue its prejudices, when they arise, as they did in the present case, from evil passions and vicious propensities. The enmity of the priests and rulers to the holy life and doctrine of Jesus was increased by his wonderful works, because hereby the truth of what he taught was confirmed, and the wickedness of his opponents exposed. This incorrigible malignity rendered them alike indifferent to the instance of Divine power which they witnessed when the guards became prostrate before Jesus, and to his benignity in healing the wound inflicted upon one of their companions. The calmness with which our Lord reproved his indiscreet friend, and his readiness in repairing the injury, ought to have softened the hearts of these men; but when unbelievers have reasoned themselves into a hatred of the truth, they are seldom, if ever, awakened to humility and repentance. Judgments and mercies are regarded as common occurrences;

and the most obvious interposition of the Divine agency neither convinces them of their errors nor makes them moderate towards others. We are disposed to wonder at the perverseness of the priests and the elders, who wilfully shut their eyes against the joint testimony of prophecy and miracles, and pursued the great Teacher of Righteousness with deadly rage. But the character of these virulent conspirators was that of all infidels, who are ever ready to league with the powers of darkness in attacking religion, out of enmity to the sublimity of its principles and the purity of its precepts. Had our Saviour forsaken his customary place of resort, and secreted himself from the pursuit of his adversaries, they would have taken occasion from that conduct to have misrepresented him as one who was conscious of evil intentions, or afraid to encounter his accusers. At all events, they were prepared to destroy him, either by false accusation to the Roman governor, or by exposing him to the vengeance of the people as an impostor. Such was the malice of these infuriated bigots towards One, whose only offence lay in the perfection of his doctrine and the benevolence of his actions. The Redeemer, who was thoroughly acquainted with their inveterate designs, met them with the boldness of a mind relying upon its integrity, and scorning to afford any advantage to the wicked by avoiding their presence. He well knew that they were determined to cut him off by public trial or private assassination; by delivering him into the hands of the Gentiles, or by inciting against him the fury of the populace. The treachery of his disciple led them to choose the former course, thinking, no doubt, that by his evidence they should be able to gain their ends with the appearance of justice. Thus did the wretches adopt the very line which proved the means of establishing the innocence of their victim, and of covering themselves with in-

famy; of accomplishing the Divine Oracles, and of making the resurrection a matter of public demonstration. Our Lord, therefore, who was thoroughly apprized of every step in his humiliating course before he entered upon it, was ready to take the cup assigned him, and to suffer all that the cruelty of his enemies could devise to torment him, because he knew, that, whatever might be their motives, the secret purposes of God would overrule the whole, to the destruction of evil and the diffusion of the Divine glory in the salvation of men. He who could have destroyed this whole band and their base employers with a single look, submitted to be bound, and to be led away as the vilest criminal, that all things might be fulfilled which were decreed and foretold concerning him; and thus by his patience and resignation he taught us the duty of meekness under affliction; "for even hereunto were we called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." 1 Pet. ii. 21.

DECEMBER THE THIRD.

THE TRIAL OF JESUS.

Mark, xiv. 61, 62.—*Again the high-priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

ALL the measures adopted by the enemies of our Lord to accomplish his destruction, and that of the religion which he came to establish, tended directly to confirm the justice of his pretensions, to demonstrate the fulfillment of the prophecies, and to render

the history of Christ, as well as the excellence of his doctrine, generally known. By accepting the infamous offer of Judas, the council adopted that course of proceeding which compelled them to enter upon a public examination; and this they were the more readily induced to do from the persuasion, that with such an evidence they should be enabled to fasten the charge of seditious practices effectually upon their prisoner. From the brevity with which the sacred writers have related the particulars of this trial, we learn that the Jewish rulers were driven to the necessity of prosecuting him as one who claimed the high distinction of being their Messiah; for in no other respect could even malice itself devise any accusation with which to reproach his character. Such was the virulence and dishonesty of these men, that they would gladly have proceeded against Jesus upon other grounds, if a plausible pretext had been offered to warrant them in so doing, or any likelihood had appeared of their being able to condemn him as a violator of the law. The Romans had left them in the full possession of their civil and ecclesiastical customs, among which the right of punishment, except in particular cases, was expressly recognized. That the Sanhedrim, therefore, did not institute any process against our Saviour within their own privileged jurisdiction, can only be accounted for by their utter incapacity to ascertain sufficient matter to effect the deadly object which they had in view. Nothing short of his death would satisfy these men, and that could be accomplished in no other way than by accusing him to the military power, which was naturally jealous, and easily disposed to punish with the utmost severity those who were barely suspected of a design to disturb the public peace. The high-priest, by his ensnaring questions, endeavoured to draw such a confession from our Lord, with respect to his disciples and his

doctrines, as might justify a speedy sentence in his own court, or furnish sufficient reasons for bringing Jesus before the governor, as a person who was at the head of a conspiracy to subvert the government. When the base attempts of this unrighteous judge proved abortive, through the calm deportment of the prisoner, who referred to his public acts and discourses for the only proper answer to what was demanded of him; the members of this iniquitous assembly exerted themselves with an officious zeal to obtain witnesses, who were encouraged in perjury by the very men whose official duty it was to punish them for their wickedness. To such a height of impiety had this state arrived, that the stream of justice was poisoned at its source; and the teachers of religion and the administrators of the laws, united together for the purpose of taking away the life of the innocent, by inflaming the minds of the people, and seducing men to the commission of a crime which strikes at the foundation of all society. But even here the enemies of the Redeemer overreached themselves by their haste to effect his ruin in the way which they wished; for, whether from the inconsistency of their instructions, or the want of capacity in the wretches suborned by them, the evidence given by these witnesses did not agree; so that, through this deficiency, no sentence could be passed upon him by the law of Moses. In this exigency the spirit of the president was manifested in his eagerness to procure the death of one who was dreaded by him on account of his wonderful works, the exemplary holiness of his life, and the exalted purity of his doctrine. Finding that nothing could be done in the ordinary method of proceeding, and that even fraud and invention had failed to substantiate any capital charge against Jesus, the high-priest had recourse to an expedient, which, though it might seem to answer the desired end, was productive of

consequences very different from what were intended by this furious judge and his malicious associates. By adjuring our Lord to declare whether he was the Messiah, these chiefs of the Jewish nation brought the question between him and them to the most serious issue ; and by convicting him of blasphemy, without entering into an investigation of his pretensions, they were guilty of flagrant injustice. Now these men could not but know that Jesus had performed many wonderful actions, all of which were of the most benevolent kind, and such as plainly evinced his divine authority ; when, therefore, they heard him thus solemnly affirm that he was the Son of the Blessed, it became them, as believers in the Sacred Oracles, which contained the predictions of his coming, to have referred this national concern to a deliberate inquiry. But, instead of doing this, the council at once, with the high-priest at their head, pronounced this Teacher of Righteousness, who had wrought so many miracles among them, worthy of death as a blasphemer. By this act they rejected the Messiah and renounced the covenant of promise, which, in the very next step of their proceedings, became transferred to the Gentiles ; for, in delivering up the Redeemer into the hands of the Romans, who were compelled to put him to death according to their own manner, the regal title of the sufferer was proclaimed, and the prophetic Scriptures were fulfilled, by which he was thus described : " The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair : I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me : therefore shall I not be confounded : therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me ; who will contend with me ? let us stand to-

gether : who is mine adversary ? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me ; who is he that shall condemn me ? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment ; the moth shall eat them up." Is. l. 5—9.

DECEMBER THE FOURTH.

THE FALL OF PETER.

Luke, xii. 62.—*And Peter went out and wept bitterly.*

OF all the Apostles, St. Peter appears to have had the most personal courage ; but it was mixed with an unbecoming confidence and an intemperate ardour of spirit, which involved him in many difficulties. He was sincere in his profession of religion, and had the honour of his Master really at heart ; but, for the want of discretion, he was forward in declarations and actions, which, however honest they might be in the intention, were injurious rather than serviceable to the object which he had in view. More particulars, however, are recorded of this disciple than of any other, and the reason is obvious ; because in the Christian life, as well as in every other practical system, the miscarriages of eminent men furnish the most effectual illustration of true principles, by showing the effects of those which are adopted in haste or formed without judgment. Thus our Apostle, when he beheld Jesus walking on the water, was desirous of evincing his own fortitude in the same manner ; but his faith soon failed to support him in a situation where his duty did not call him, and he was constrained to cry aloud for help. The reproof which he experienced on this occasion was not sufficient to correct the vehemence of his temper, for we find him presuming to contradict our

Lord when he gave an account of the sufferings which he was to undergo, as indispensibly necessary to the great work of human redemption. For this officious interference Peter was censured with the sharp rebuke of his worldly spirit, which savoured the things of men rather than those of God; but even this did not allay his fervid zeal, or render him more moderate in his opinions and circumspect in his expressions. At the paschal supper, when Jesus called the attention of his disciples to the dismal scenes which were approaching, and, among other particulars, foretold the defection of all his followers in the hour of his visitation, Peter was so greatly agitated by the affecting description; that, forgetful of his past indiscretions, he ventured to obtrude himself as an exception to the general charge, saying, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." This declaration was not only rash, but uncharitable, as it assumed a superiority on the part of the Apostle over his brethren, when, if he had called to mind his former errors, he would have found that not one of his companions had been guilty of equal weakness with himself. To correct the confidence of his servant, and to render his example instructive to all generations, our blessed Lord predicted, in circumstantial terms, the awful lapse into which Peter would be hurried that very night. In the garden, indeed, this zealous attendant was forward to show his courage, by drawing his sword and smiting at random, though a little before he was so drowsy as to fall asleep on his post: and when his Master gave himself up into the hands of his enemies, Peter took advantage of the confusion to make his escape. Still anxious, however, to ascertain the fate of his beloved Lord, he followed the band afar off, and kept watching before the gate of the palace, where being descried by one of his friends, that disciple obtained admis-

sion for him of the person who kept the door. The name of Peter's companion is not mentioned by the sacred historian who has related the interesting fact; but his conduct, in this instance, indicated a mind strong in faith and calm in resolution, forming an admirable contrast to the impetuous eagerness, and want of reflection, which proved so fatal to his associate. Though personally known to the high-priest, that disciple was not ashamed to accompany Jesus into the palace, or to avow his intimacy with one of his followers. Nothing farther is said of this person; but from the narrative it is evident, that, having obtained admission for his friend, he went to the upper part of the hall, where the members of the council were sitting, and Jesus before them; while Peter, under a timid apprehension of being discovered, remained among the servants at the other extremity. In this situation he was at first noticed by the woman who received him into the house; and she judging, from the character of his acquaintance, that he must also be one of our Lord's disciples, challenged him as such before the company. Peter, startled by the charge, and fearful of the consequences, immediately declared that he had no knowledge of what he was accused with; and this denial he repeated more vehemently on being taxed to the same effect by another woman. His restless behaviour drew upon him the attention of the persons who were gathered round the fire; and it is remarkable, that a full hour was suffered to pass before he was attacked the third time, during which space he might have retreated from the spot; instead of which, he not only continued in the same place, but, as it appears, in free conversation with the people; for, on being recognized by some who had seen him in the garden, certain of the by-standers, who had watched him narrowly, observed that his dialect, as a Galilean, was a corroborating proof of the truth

of what was alleged. All this so provoked Peter, who was naturally obstinate, that what he had before affirmed from fear he now maintained out of resentment; and in the whirlwind raised by his imprudence, he persisted with the most shocking assertions to deny all knowledge of the man. This sad scene did not pass unobserved by the Redeciner, who, when the cock gave notice of the morning watch, turned and looked upon Peter, to remind him of his recent protestation and his present degraded condition. That glance penetrated the soul of the Apostle, and awakened him to a sense of his sin. He left the place and wept bitterly, which he might have done at an earlier period, instead of standing to brave a set of persons, who became convinced, by his intemperate heat and violent expressions, that he was what at first they had only suspected him to be. Such was the fall of St. Peter, which is recorded to teach us the necessity of an habitual command over our thoughts and words, of avoiding all occasions of offence where the interests of truth may be injured by contention, and of shunning the company of those who are bent upon mischief. But while we learn humility from this error of an eminent Apostle, we may also derive encouragement from his repentance, which was immediate, deep, and lasting; manifested by the bitterness of his sorrow, the uniformity of his future conduct, and the fortitude with which he suffered a painful death, in imitation of his Master. Let us, then, from his example, study, according to the language of the same blessed saint, "to make our calling and election sure; for if we do these things, we shall never fall; and so an entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

DECEMBER THE FIFTH.

THE MAJESTY OF CHRIST.

John, xviii. 36.—*My kingdom is not of this world.*

WHEN the persecutors of Jesus hurried him before the tribunal of the Roman governor, they seem to have anticipated a speedy sentence of condemnation, by representing the object of their malice as the head of a political faction. Nothing, indeed, could be more artful, though nothing was more false, than the terms of their accusation; “we found this man perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ, a king.” Pilate, who was neither a stranger to the perverse disposition of these people, nor to their expectations of the Messiah, was justly surprized at this affectation of loyalty to the imperial government; and being sensible that their pretended zeal for the public peace was only a cloak to cover their envy, he began to enter upon a stricter investigation of the business than the bigots desired. Mortified at meeting with this delay in their sanguinary pursuit, the members of the council, who were conscious that they had not evidence to support their charge, began to urge the procurator to comply with their demands, by clamour and menaces. “If this man,” said they, “were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee;” which haughty and indecent language signified, that their conviction ought to be admitted as a sufficient proof of the prisoner’s guilt. Pilate, therefore, on hearing this unwarrantable assumption, retorted, by directing the Jewish rulers to try and punish Jesus according to their own law. Aware, that in accepting this offer they should

lose their aim, the zealots confessed that the present case did not come within their jurisdiction, and thus they at once avowed their blood-thirsty designs, and indirectly allowed the innocence of the person whose life they so virulently sought. By abandoning the accusation of blasphemy, which was the only offence upon which they could have proceeded against him in their own courts, and the right to punish which was still reserved to them, they acquitted our Lord entirely of any violation of the Mosaic institutions. Thus the matter was brought to the simple issue of adjudging him to death, as one who arrogated the regal and divine title of the Messiah, his claims to which the Jews did not condescend to examine, though they sought his life for assuming it; while Pilate, who was a heathen, and naturally cruel, treated him with respect, and inquired into his pretensions with candour. The contrast which the behaviour of this man presented to that of the hypocrites, who would not enter the judgment-hall for fear of being defiled, induced our Saviour to answer such questions as were put to him on the principal charge of his adversaries with freedom. There was something in the deportment of the sufferer, so meek and yet dignified, that Pilate, even supposing him to have been ignorant of the works which Jesus had performed, could not help thinking that what was stated of his august pretensions might not be altogether void of foundation. There is a native majesty which rises superior to poverty, and cannot be marred by affliction, which commands reverence under the most abject circumstances, and renders misery sacred by the virtue with which it is supported. Such was the case when the Lord of Glory became a man of sorrows, and stood bound at the bar of the Roman deputy, who regarded him with sentiments bordering, at least, on veneration; while his countrymen, to

whom he had been so great a benefactor by his doctrine and his miracles, were waiting without, like beasts of prey, thirsting for his blood. It may seem unaccountable that Pilate should ask one who was brought before him as an impostor, whether he had any actual claims to the regal character; but it is still more extraordinary, that when Jesus made an open declaration of his dignity, the governor should have redoubled his efforts to save him, instead of delivering him instantly up with contempt to the vengeance of his enemies. This remarkable conduct is best explained by the reply which our Saviour gave to the question which Pilate put to him; "My kingdom," said the Divine sufferer, "is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." By this answer our Lord satisfied the governor that there was nothing of a political nature or of a warlike description in his designs. But we are not from hence to infer, as some have strangely done, that, because Jesus thought proper to vindicate his system from the charge of sedition, therefore his church is without authority, and was left destitute of any regular form of administration for the direction of its members upon earth. This passage, which has been forced to a sense subversive of all Christian order, proves destructive of the very fallacy it has been alleged to support; for, in affirming that he had a kingdom, though not of this world, our Lord plainly avowed his royalty, which could neither exist without subjects nor be effectual without laws. But into the properties of these it was not necessary for Jesus to enter, nor did Pilate require any such thing, being convinced by the frankness of the prisoner that the government had nothing to apprehend from a person of this description. It is, however, evident from our Lord's own words, that he has a kingdom in this

world, though not of it, being different from human policy, and intended, as he immediately afterwards informed Pilate, to reveal the knowledge and to promote the practice of truth. Now, as this kingdom had a visible founder in the person of the Messiah, so it was regularly constituted by him with all the forms and ordinances necessary for its continuance. The church of Christ is therefore a society, duly organized with offices and institutions, laws and sanctions, for the government and edification of its members to the end of time. This church, which is begun upon earth; will be consummated in heaven, where all the faithful subjects of Christ shall be admitted to reign with him for ever; while the profane scoffer and the impenitent libertine, the nominal professor and the uncharitable zealot, are rejected; for into the new Jerusalem, which is the city of the living God, "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lye; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Rev. xxi. 27.

DECEMBER THE SIXTH.

PILATE AND HEROD.

Luke, xxiii. 12.—And the same day Herod and Pilate were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.

It is hardly possible to consider the character of Pilate without being agitated by the mingled feelings of pity and resentment, admiration and contempt. When we behold him struggling against the violent proceedings of an unprincipled party and the clamours of a misguided populace, we naturally respect the man, as one who was actuated by conscientious

motives ; but when we reflect on the power with which he was invested, and see him neglect to use it for the protection of the innocent, all our esteem vanishes, and we have no hesitation in consigning the cowardly governor to the same infamy which covers the memory of the Jewish rulers. The efforts made by Pilate to save Jesus from the fury of his enemies were evident indications of a mind alive to the sense of justice, and anxious to do what was right ; but which wanted firmness to resist evil, and to make a small sacrifice of personal interest for the sake of virtue. The first instance he gave of his weakness was that of sending our Lord to Herod, in order to get rid of the odium attending the execution of an eminent person, who was neither guilty of an offence against the particular institutions of the country, nor of any violation of the laws of the empire. By doing this, Pilate thought he should dismiss an unpleasant concern, and at the same time effect a reconciliation between himself and the tetrarch of Galilee, who would, as he thought, be gratified by this mark of attention, and be pleased with an opportunity of seeing Jesus, concerning whom he had heard so many wonderful reports. The design of the governor was partly answered ; for that same day he and Herod became such friends as worldly policy can make, and in whose amity the cause of truth is usually a sufferer. It has been supposed that the reason why Herod declined to pronounce judgment against Jesus, was the compunction which the tyrant felt on account of his conduct to the virtuous Baptist ; but however disposed we might be to think favourably, even of this man, charity must go very far in ascribing his behaviour to conscientious principles, when we see him so much degrading himself as to treat with gross insult a person who had been guilty of no crime, and whose extraordinary character entitled him to respect. Had Herod felt any re-

more for his former villany, he would not have exposed the meek and holy sufferer to the taunts of his soldiers; much less would he have joined in the base and cruel sport, which had human misery for its object. The motive of this despot in sending back Jesus to the prætorium, was nothing else than an inclination to renew his friendship with Pilate; for if the wicked disagree in other things, they are always ready enough to unite in oppressing the helpless; and they can both be cordial and courteous while engaged in destroying the righteous, though at the same time they have a rooted enmity to each other. It is probable, however, that neither Herod nor Pilate wished to imbrue their hands in the blood of Jesus; for both were inimical to his accusers, and entertained a slight opinion of the matter which was alleged against him. The Roman officer cared little about the customs and opinions of the Jewish people; and Herod, who might be thought to have felt some jealousy concerning the title of the Messiah, by which his interest was affected, was both an infidel and a libertine, who lived and acted by the Epicurean principle, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Though Pilate was displeased at being obliged to receive our Lord again into his court, he was strengthened in the opinion which he had formed on the subject by the behaviour of Herod; and this induced him to persist in his endeavours to save the victim from the rage of his adversaries. In all this we cannot but perceive the wonderful hand of God working by the devices of men, and turning the whole to his own glory. The dislike which Pilate had to the Jews, led him in a great measure to oppose their deadly purpose; and his art in remitting the cause to Herod was the means of making the innocence of Jesus more conspicuous, and the malignity of his enemies still more glaring, the effects of which were doubtless very considerable in the first planting of the

Christian church. On the serious among the Jews, this public attestation to the uprightness of our Lord's character by two such men as the Roman governor and the tetrarch of Galilee, could hardly fail to make a deep impression; while the Gentiles, when they became acquainted with all the particulars of this transaction, and knew that Pilate had little humanity in his temper, would naturally think that there must be some very extraordinary virtues in Jesus to have excited so warm an interest in the mind of one who had so few of his own. When, therefore, we contemplate this dark and complicated scene of wretchedness, in which opposite passions and the most discordant principles were made subservient to the divine glory, let us say, in the language of the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." Rom. xi. 33.

DECEMBER THE SEVENTH.

CONDEMNATION OF JESUS.

John, xix. 5.—*Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!*

THOUGH the Roman governor was perfectly convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and of the wickedness of his adversaries, he had not fortitude enough to make a noble stand in the defence of a persecuted object, whose protection was not only a matter of duty, but of honour; and in yielding, as Pilate did, to the clamours of a furious priesthood and a misled populace, he compromised the dignity of his station no less than the rights of humanity. But thus it is

when men have no fixed rule of action, the result of a determined principle. With such persons all things are left to the uncertain direction of expediency, which in most cases takes a wrong course, under the specious pretext of recommending it as the safest. Pilate knew that the Jews had delivered our Lord into his hands from the worst of all motives; but, instead of resenting their conduct as an insult to his character, and delivering the victim from their malice, he proceeded to remonstrances when he should have acted with vigour. The Jews knew how to take an advantage of this imbecility; and while the procurator doubted, they were active in gathering the mob around his palace, so that he began to be apprehensive of an insurrection, which it was easy to have prevented by prompt measures and a resolute decree. It is observable, that the wife of Pilate had more virtue than her husband; for at the very time when he was fluctuating between the voice of conscience and his fear of the people, she sent to warn him against complying with their unrighteous demands. The governor did not want the will to follow her advice, and he seems to have been stimulated by it to farther exertions, for the purpose of softening the obdurate hearts of the Jewish elders; but the means which he took only served to involve him in difficulty and to increase the popular fury. His first unfortunate step was that of giving them their choice which of the two prisoners should be released unto them, at the feast—Barabbas, a notorious robber, or Jesus, who was called Christ. Pilate conceived that he had now ensured the deliverance of our Lord; for it was not to be imagined that any set of men could be so hardened in cruelty and shameless in their impiety, as to prefer a villain covered with the blackest crimes, to one whose whole life had been spent in doing good. But here the governor betrayed his ignorance of mankind, as

well as his indiscretion in making an offer which he could not recall; for they who have once openly avowed their disregard of justice, will not scruple to plunge deeper into infamy, rather than recede from the wrong which they have committed, or renounce the errors they have embraced. Thus the Jews had no hesitation in closing with the proposal made to them, and, without feeling any compunction, they began to clamour for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. Embarrassed by this demand, Pilate had recourse to the mean device of washing his hands before the multitude, protesting against shedding innocent blood, when at the same time it was still in his power to have kept his conscience clear, by asserting the rights of humanity in opposition to men who were unworthy of being treated with respect or lenity. If Pilate thought that by this foolish ceremony he should make an impression upon the multitude, he was mistaken; for they turned this also to his confusion, by imprecating the consequences of the guilt upon themselves and their children. The last expedient which the cowardly magistrate adopted to preserve his internal peace and outward reputation, both of which he was sensible would be injured by his acquiescence, was in causing our Lord to be scourged, crowned with thorns, and arrayed in a purple robe, thinking that so striking and affecting a spectacle would move the pity of the people. But here also Pilate deceived himself; for such was the degenerate state of the public morals, through the prevalence of infidelity, that a sight which would have melted barbarians, served only to enrage the Jews and to render them more desperate. It was natural enough for them to imagine that the intention of the heathen ruler in so dressing up the object of their animosity, was only to make a ridicule of their profession, to cast contempt upon their known

expectations, and to triumph over their present enslaved condition. Thus the design of Pilate, which was to allay the tempest, served only to increase it ; and neither the blood flowing from the temples of Jesus, the furrows inflicted upon his body, nor his meek and submissive deportment, could inspire this furious assembly with sentiments of remorse and tenderness. All that was done to moderate their violence had the opposite effect ; but then every part of the transaction was distinguished by circumstances which, without design, contributed to publish the regal character and divine nature of the Redeemer ; showing beyond all question, by the joint testimony of the council and the nation, as well as of the Roman prætor, that he suffered in no other capacity than as the Messiah ; or, in the language of the title affixed to his cross, as being “ Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

DECEMBER THE EIGHTH.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

Luke, xxiii. 34.—*Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.*

If the saying of the heathen moralist be true, that the sight of a good man struggling nobly with adversity is most pleasing to the Divinity, how transcendently glorious must have been that august scene which was exhibited on Calvary, when the Son of God bore our sins in his own body on the tree ! The sufferings he endured previous to this tremendous catastrophe were alone sufficient to have overpowered the firmest mind ; yet none of the contumelies which were heaped upon him drew from his lips any impatient expression or sorrowful com-

plaint. The crown of thorns which encircled his head must have given him exquisite pain, especially when it was violently smitten by the soldier's staff; and of this we may be certain, from the conduct of his guards, that the scourges were far from being laid on his body with a sparing hand. Pilate, though he endeavoured to avoid the odium of putting our Lord to death, did not interpose his authority to moderate the rigour of punishment; and there were some particulars in the treatment of this extraordinary Sufferer which differed in ignominy and cruelty from what were commonly inflicted upon the most atrocious malefactors. The prophetic description was exactly verified in him; for he was "led like a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." But while the victims which represented him were slain with humanity and regarded as sacred, the Lamb of God, who took away the sin of the world, was despised and rejected of men, abused as the vilest of criminals, tortured by those who believed him innocent, and at last consigned to a lingering death, with a public proclamation affixed to his cross, that this was the King of the Jews. Still in all these accumulated wrongs and unparalleled miseries, the Redeemer maintained a perfect equanimity of temper; sensible indeed of all the ills he was called to bear, and feeling bodily anguish to the utmost degree of acute perception, yet never shrinking from the prospect of fresh injuries, any more than murmuring under the pressure of those which he was enduring. In his slow progress to the place of execution he was obliged to carry upon his wounded shoulders the transverse beam by which he was to be suspended; and then, indeed, for a time his limbs tottered under the ponderous load. This, however, was a bodily infirmity, which showed that in his case there was no supernatural strength imparted to him, for the purpose of en-

abling him the better to sustain the hard trial which he had to undergo. On the contrary, he was now left to the full endurance of all the misery belonging to that state which he had voluntarily undertaken ; and such was his fortitude, that he refused the narcotic potion of myrrh and wine, which was usually given to persons in his condition, for the purpose of deadening the sense of pain. All his concern was for others ; and when he beheld his female friends lamenting as they followed him, he turned to console them in terms of endearing tenderness, which showed the calm dignity of his mind, the entire command of all his faculties, and the sympathizing sweetness of his disposition. When the soldiers had stretched him out to the fullest extent upon the fatal tree, driven in the nails through the palms of his hands and between the tendons of the feet, where the nerves are endued with the most acute perception, they raised the cross and wedged it firmly into the ground. There hangs the Lord of glory, the Saviour of men, between heaven and earth, racked with tormenting pain, and hearing the most blasphemous expressions and illiberal invectives, to which his only reply was this : “ Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do ! ” Such was the exalted philanthropy of the blessed Redeemer in the midst of agonies, which were rendered peculiarly severe by a refinement of cruelty and the virulent reproaches of his persecutors. But, instead of denouncing against them the divine judgments, the exalted Sufferer pitied their blind depravity, and prayed for their eternal salvation.

Sinner, draw near, and behold the Son of God in human nature, mangled and tormented with unknown sufferings through all his powers ; not merely labouring in the anguish of corporeal misery, but oppressed with mental horror, and sinking beneath the eclipse of that radiant countenance, the shining

of which upon the soul is more than a counter-balance to all the afflictions of life and the agonies of death ! For what purpose was this inconceivable mass of woe accumulated upon one whose whole time was spent in doing good ? What end could be designed in thus pouring out the vial of wrath upon the person of one so meek and benevolent, so wise and gracious, as the blessed Jesus ? Was it, that we might learn from the history of this gracious Teacher, to be, like him, patient and resigned to the Divine will, gentle in our deportment, compassionate to all men, and forgiving to our enemies ? All this doubtless we are taught by the example of our Lord's great humility ; but if we stop here, our improvement will consist rather in a sentimental feeling and the expression of admiration, than the subjugation of the passions and the practice of those virtues which we profess to copy. Unless we behold Jesus suffering for our iniquities, we shall never have a proper sense of his infinite goodness, nor be able to set this perfect model before us, for our constant imitation. But when sin begins to be crucified in us, and when we abhor it as that which brought the Holy One from the throne of glory, to take upon him our nature, that he might obey the law in our stead, and suffer its penalties to the utmost extent, then will the death of the Redeemer be our life, or quickening principle, inspiring us with the love of holiness, and enabling us to " follow His steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously : who his own self bare our sins in his own body, on the tree, that we being dead unto sins should live unto righteousness ; by whose stripes we are healed." 1 Pet. ii. 21—24.

DECEMBER, THE NINTH.

THE PENITENT THIEF.

Luke, xxiii. 42.—*And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

EVERY incident in the history of our Saviour's passion is pregnant with instruction and comfort, teaching us the principles of duty, and leading our thoughts to that high sacrifice which was offered on the cross for the expiation of our transgressions. The infinite value of that atonement was demonstrated in the application of it, while the blood was yet flowing from the victim to the cleansing of one who might most truly be considered as an emblem of human nature defiled by sin and condemned by the law. It had been foretold many ages before, that the Lamb of God should at his death be numbered with malefactors; and this was verified when the Jewish people preferred a murderer to the Lord of life; but it was again literally fulfilled in the last tremendous scene, when two thieves were crucified with him, one on the right hand and the other on the left. The execution of two criminals at such a season, was not a matter that of itself would have obtained prophetic distinction, because, as a common occurrence, it was no more than what might as well happen then as at any other season. But the circumstance was predicted on account of some extraordinary particulars by which it should be distinguished, and to indicate the effects that should be produced by the humiliation and death of the Messiah. From the mere literal prophecy nothing more indeed might be inferred than the simple fact, that the holy Sufferer there described would be dragged

from prison to the tribunal, and from thence be hurried with criminals to the place of execution. But it is added, that he should make intercession for the very transgressors with whom he would be so associated. *Is. liii. 12.* Now this we know is the principal branch of the mediatorial office; and surely nothing could be more unaccountable than the ascribing such an act to one who was himself in a state of condemnation, and suffering the punishment of his real or imputed offences. The intercession mentioned by the prophet is an act of grace, and it is expressly stated to be one of the fruits of that sacrifice which should be made for transgressors by Him who pours out his soul voluntarily unto death. All this agrees with the conversion of the malefactor, and the assurance of mercy which was given unto him by his Fellow-sufferer. It is needless to indulge in cold speculations upon this interesting subject, or to conjecture by what means this man had gained that knowledge of our Lord which some have supposed him to possess. We do not read of his having witnessed the miracles of Jesus; and it is hardly to be imagined that such a profligate as he had been, was at any time a hearer of the Gospel. But, on the other hand, we are not to conclude that he was altogether unacquainted with the principles of religion because his life had been irregular. The contrary, indeed, appears evident in his behaviour when he was writhing in agony, and yet, from a sense of humanity, he reproved his companion for the brutality and impiety of his conduct. While one of these unhappy men became obdurate by his condition, the other was properly affected by his awful situation, and the view of his speedy dissolution awakened him to the conviction of his enormities. This remembrance of his crimes produced that godly sorrow which worketh repentance; and he was now anxious to obtain that pardon from Heaven

which he could not expect from men. When, therefore, the rulers vented their unmanly rage against Jesus, and blasphemously mocked him as the Christ, or chosen One of God, who had saved others but was unable to help himself; the vile reproaches of these wretches let in a flood of light upon the agitated mind of this outcast, and induced him to address the Redeemer while the power of sense and speech remained. Deriving encouragement from what was confessed of our Saviour's power and pretensions, the man eagerly caught at this prospect, which was miraculously held out for the relief of his despairing soul. He turned the mockery offered to the holy Sufferer into matter of serious reflection; and judging from the Saviour's meek deportment that he was in reality what the populace called him in derision, the penitent resolved to cast himself upon that benignity which appeared so conspicuous amidst the horrors of death and the insults of the wicked. The Divinity, which the profane crew around the cross despised and ridiculed, the dying thief saw impressed on the placid countenance of the Redeemer, heard it in the prayer which he offered for his enemies, and witnessed it with astonishment in all the agonies that rent his frame. Thus the cruelty and infidelity of the Jewish people and their rulers, proved the means of enlightening this miserable being, and of saving him from destruction; while his wretched companion, who had the same opportunities, was left to perish in his impenitence. The one entered into Paradise with his Saviour, as the first fruits of the cross; and the other went to his own place. But though the goodness of God, in the rescue of a sinner from perdition, was strikingly displayed in this instance; let no person flutter himself with the delusive hope, that a procrastinated repentance will be accepted when the means of grace have been repeatedly neglected. As the case of this penitent

malefactor was extraordinary in all respects, so was it shaded by the awful spectacle of another human being dying by his Saviour's side, without compunction and destitute of consolation. This man heard the confession of his associate, but it made no impression upon his hardened mind, nor did it induce him to seek an interest in that salvation which was promised in the gracious declaration of our Lord. They who trust to the efficacy of a death-bed repentance, would do well to reflect upon this affecting sight; for should they be even permitted to linger in the possession of their faculties for a considerable time on the brink of eternity, it is at least possible that they may cling to life, with such a persuasion of recovery, as to have little apprehension of their danger, till the last warning leaves them no time for recollection. "Wherefore, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

DECEMBER THE TENTH.

THE CENTURION'S CONFESSION.

Matt. xxvii. 54.—Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

THE miracles which distinguished our Lord's death, were equal to those wrought in the course of his life; but they were of a kind that suited the tremendous majesty of the scene. All nature bore testimony

to the dignity of the sufferer, for the heavens above were clothed with darkness, and the sun, without the intervention of any other body, withdrew his light; storms convulsed the atmosphere, the earth shook, and the rocks were shivered. But neither these supernatural events, nor the marvellous rending of the vail in the temple, and the opening of the tombs of the saints, equalled the wonderful manner by which the Redeemer yielded to the stroke of mortality. His dissolution was not marked by a gradual suspension of respiration, convulsive struggles, and an agonizing shriek, but by the victor's triumphant shout, "It is finished!" These words were uttered with a loud voice, and in so exclaiming the Saviour bowed his head, in voluntary submission, and gave up the ghost. Well, therefore, might the Roman commander, who presided on this occasion, be filled with terror when he witnessed a departure so uncommon, and differing in all respects from the lingering and excruciating death of the cross. This man and his companions were no strangers to the character of Jesus, and the offence for which he suffered. They had attended to his examination, both in the presence of Pilate and of Herod; so that they became well acquainted with those particulars of our Lord's history, which were alleged as the grounds of accusation against him by his relentless persecutors. But the Roman soldiers were far from showing any pity to the prisoner when he was delivered up into their hands; for they not only lacerated his body with the scourge, but they wrapped round his head a thorny wreath, the prickles of which, at that season; were peculiarly hard and pungent. At the place of execution these men behaved with more than ordinary cruelty to their victim; and with a wish, no doubt, to gain the favour of the rulers, they joined in the mockery with which he was treated, and added some aggravating circumstances to render

him an object of ridicule, and to increase his suffering. There was then no inclination on the part of the military band to countenance the report of prodigies, which tended to their own shame; and nothing but an overpowering conviction of the divinity of Jesus could have drawn from them and their commander the declaration, "Of a truth this was the Son of God." There is indeed a slight verbal difference in the confession of the centurion, given by the three Evangelists, who have recorded the fact; but as they all agree in the circumstances, so are they reconciled without any difficulty with respect to the language; for two of the sacred writers, Matthew and Mark, state the words as they were uttered, while Luke contents himself with relating what was confessed. Yet it will be found, upon close investigation, that the record, as given by this historian, not only corresponds with that of his brethren, but amounts, if possible, to a still more explicit acknowledgement of the divinity of Jesus. According to this account, the officer, on beholding the miracles, and witnessing the august manner in which the Saviour proclaimed the cessation of his labour, "glorified God, saying, Certainly this man was the Righteous;" which expression is exactly the same with that used by the apostle Peter, when he boldly charged the people in the temple with having "denied the Holy One and the Just." Acts, iii. 14. The Righteous or the Just One, and the Son of God, are synonymous appellations; and therefore the confession of this heathen was an admission of the fundamental article of our religion, that the only begotten of his Father, full of grace and truth, took upon him our nature in the womb of the Virgin, and was offered upon the cross as the high sacrifice for our sins. If it be asked, how the centurion came by this faith, the answer, as in the case of the penitent thief, is this, that Divine mercy operated to the

illumination of his understanding by the instrumentality of the unbelieving Jews, who condemned our Lord for asserting this very title, and insulted him with it at his crucifixion; so that when his glory was displayed, to the confusion of these gain-sayers, there were not wanting some who became converts to the truth and witnesses of the power of God. This centurion, though a Pagan by birth and education, felt the full force of the evidences which surrounded him, and, without dreading the displeasure of his superiors or the malice of the Jews, he made a public and honest declaration of his belief, that "this was the Son of God:" from his example, then, let us learn to be equally candid and sincere; living as becometh the disciples of Christ, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Rom. x. 10.

DECEMBER THE ELEVENTH.

THE WATER AND BLOOD.

John, xix. 34.—*But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.*

As the death of Christ was a perfect sacrifice of atonement, and the completion of all the typical predictions, it was attended with circumstances that corresponded with the mystical institutions of the tabernacle, and clearly showed the accomplishment of the prophecies. Thus it was ordained that the paschal lamb should be without blemish, and that not a bone of it should be broken, even in the act of slaying and dressing it; to which remarkable precept the Psalmist seems to allude in his predictive

description of the Messiah's humiliation; "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but Jehovah delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." Ps. xxxiv. 20. An injunction so explicit as this must have had some prospective object, for it could have no moral signification in-itself, since, however fitting it might be, that an offering of thankful remembrance should be in all respects of the purest quality which the nature of the thing admitted, there was no apparent reason for keeping the bones of the victim entire after the ceremony was finished. But every type was a prophecy, and pointed to some particulars in the mystery of redemption, that was to be revealed; and of which the deliverance of Israel from the house of bondage was a lively representation. The lamb slain at the passover figured the Holy One, who in the fulness of time was to bear the sins of mankind in his own person, and pour out his blood for their expiation. All the particulars, therefore, in this rite, were to be necessarily fulfilled in the offering to which the whole referred; and of course in the sacrifice of the Redeemer we must seek for what was symbolically set forth to the church of old, in the sacramental services, which shadowed his incarnation and death. Now had our blessed Lord suffered as a blasphemer, according to the judicial forms of the Jewish law, these points of resemblance would not have been found; and we should have sought in vain for the sacrificial character in the manner of his death. Besides, his actual resurrection might have remained a matter of some doubt, at least with the enemies of the faith, if the most unequivocal proofs had not been given of his dissolution. By the regulation of Divine wisdom, therefore, making use of the malignant and cruel purposes of men, Jesus was delivered at the season of the passover into the hands of the Romans, that he might endure the most horrible

punishment, which, according to their usages, was inflicted upon the vilest of criminals. But even here it was probable that the typical institution would have wanted its correspondence in one particular; for it was the custom of these people to break the legs of the malefactors after a certain time, in order to accelerate their end. This dreadful operation was already performed on the two thieves who suffered with our Lord; but when the soldier perceived that he was dead already, the man thought it needless to give himself any farther trouble. Thus the Scripture, which foretold and described the history of the passion, was accomplished by means that in appearance had no possible connexion with any such design. Neither the Jews nor the Romans were actuated by other motives than those of personal animosity and wanton cruelty; yet both concurred, by the over-ruling agency of Providence, in bringing about the decrees of Heaven. There was still another circumstance in this astonishing transaction, which human wisdom could neither have foreseen nor contrived; for the action of the Roman soldier, in piercing the side of our Saviour, was the mere impulse of the moment, and intended for no other purpose than that of extinguishing the last spark of life, or of gratifying a wanton curiosity. But here also the power of God was manifest; for while the wound thus inflicted on a vital part determined the death of the sufferer beyond all question, a phenomenon followed it, which decided as clearly the expiatory character of this offering. The propitiatory sacrifices were distinguished no less by the lustration of water than by the effusion of blood, both being considered as indispensibly requisite to constitute a perfect atonement; and where the case would admit, the blood of the victim was shed over a running stream. In all respects, then, the death of Christ answered the typical representations of it;

for when the organ of life was divided by the spear, there issued from his opened side both blood and water. They who seek natural causes for every miraculous occurrence, would fain attribute what is here related to the rupture of the bag inclosing the heart, by which means the limpid fluid there contained is supposed to have exuded through the wound. But if this had been all, the matter so discharged would not have had the appearance of water; for, besides its own peculiar colour, it would have received such a tinge from the blood of the heart, as must have rendered it impossible to perceive any difference. The Evangelist, who saw what he has minutely described, expressly declares, that pure water came out of the wound as well as pure blood; so that the two fluids were not mingled but perfectly distinct. Justly, therefore, does the Apostle in another place class this preternatural fact among the terrestrial witnesses by which Jesus is proved to be the Son of God; for the miraculous effusion that distinguished his death afforded a decisive evidence that the sacrifice was finished, and that now was fulfilled what the prophet had foretold, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Zech. xiii. 1.

DECEMBER THE TWELFTH.

THE RESURRECTION.

Matt. xxviii. 15.—*So they took the money and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

THE animosity of the Jewish rulers to the person and character of Jesus was not abated by his cruci-

fixion, but, on the contrary, the hatred of these men became more inveterate in proportion as their malice was gratified. Conscience made them uneasy even in the midst of their triumphs; and knowing the power which our Lord had displayed in the restoration of life, they began to dread the fulfillment of what he had repeatedly predicted of his own resurrection. Their fears were apparent in the confession which they made to the governor; "Sir, we remember that the deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first." The conduct of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, in rescuing the body of Jesus from that ignominious insult with which the remains of malefactors were commonly treated, contributed, no doubt, to increase the apprehensions of the bigots; for the wicked are always ready to suspect the motives of the righteous, and to ascribe their benevolent deeds to evil designs or interested purposes. The Pharisees, who were attentive hearers of our Lord, had carefully laid up his sayings in their minds, and they were well aware of his meaning when he said that no other sign should be given them than that of the prophet Jonah; nor were they at any loss in understanding the comparison which he made of himself to a ruined temple, that should be restored within three days after its demolition. When, therefore, these zealots perceived the impression which the death of Jesus had made upon the people of Jerusalem, so different from what was expected by his virulent persecutors, they were sorry that he had not been taken off by other means, or at an earlier period. This negligence, and the courtesy of Pilate in granting the body to Joseph, they called the first error; and to

prevent the occurrence of another still more fatal to their credit, they made this request, which turned out as such cunning policy usually does, in the manifestation of the truth and the mortification of its enemies. Pilate, whose respect for these men was certainly not increased by their present application, treated them and their petition with sarcastic civility: "Ye have a watch," replied the haughty governor with an indignant contempt for their superstitious fears, "ye have a watch: go your way, and make the tomb of the dead man as sure as you can." But while the Jews were taking precautions which eventually served to establish what they were intended to refute, the disciples themselves were not only innocent of any such design, but sceptical to an extraordinary degree, with respect to the promise of their Master's revival. This jealousy of the malicious Jews and incredulity of the followers of Jesus, concurred, by the direction of Infinite Wisdom, in verifying the resurrection and multiplying its witnesses. The guards stationed at the sepulchre being alarmed by the convulsion of the earth, the rolling away of the stone, and the angelic vision, fled, on recovering their spirits, into the city, where they imparted the strange intelligence to their employers, who, instead of treating the whole as a fraudulent invention or the dream of superstition, lectured the soldiers in a lie, and secured their fidelity by a bribe. But the story which they were hired to tell confuted itself; for, besides the improbability that a few unarmed men could break into the sepulchre, the entrance of which was so defended, it was not in the power of the guards to tell what was done in their sleep. It is true, the removal of the body in a secret manner would naturally lead to the conclusion, that it must have been performed by the friends of the deceased; but then an obvious question presents itself, what end could be answered

by such an act? for if Jesus was not afterwards seen by competent witnesses of his identity, the transportation of his remains to another place, known only to the persons concerned in the transaction, might have excited wonder, but nothing else. The fact could not have been adduced to support an article of faith, and the believers in Christ would have taken uncommon pains, with great personal hazard, for no purpose creditable to themselves or beneficial to their cause. The citizens of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of Judæa, were not so besotted as to believe in the resuscitation of one who had died publicly, and by an infamous mode of execution, merely because his body was not to be found where it had been deposited by two men of high rank, whose character rendered them incapable of any share in a useless plot. The preacher that should have had the hardihood to allege a fact of this nature upon such slender grounds, would never have obtained an audience among reasonable men; and yet nothing is more certain than this, that the disciples of Christ boldly asserted their Lord's resurrection, in the temple, at the bar of the council, before the Roman governor, and in vast assemblies of intelligent hearers, where they would have been instantly contradicted, if what they advanced was an idle fiction or a gross imposture. But while the Apostles dauntlessly rested the whole of the doctrine which they taught upon this fundamental article, the Sanhedrim heard them and were silent; neither denying the charges that were brought against themselves, nor investigating the miraculous transaction, the confutation of which was of equal importance to their interests and reputation. That the council had the inclination to do this, cannot be doubted; for they who persecuted bitterly the propagators of Christianity, wanted not the will to stifle their doctrines; and that they did it not, affords an abundant

proof that "it was not the work of men, but of God." Acts, v. 39.

DECEMBER THE THIRTEENTH.

THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS.

Luke, xxiv. 32.—*And they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?*

THAT the resurrection of our Lord was attested by witnesses whose credibility stood unimpeached at the time when the miracle happened, is evident from the publication of the fact, the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles to a faith which was founded upon this article, and the silence of those who were interested in its refutation by their character and their principles. Objections indeed have been advanced against this truth by modern infidels, whose cavils would, if admitted, tend equally to impeach the integrity of all history, and to throw into uncertainty every event of ancient times. If any man imagines that the public appearance of Jesus to the Jewish nation would have settled the matter more strongly; either with respect to the proof of the fact or the conviction of unbelievers, he is mistaken; for they who could resist the miracles which our Saviour performed, would not have been persuaded even though they had seen him rise from the dead. The same spirit of infidelity which then hardened men's minds against the proofs of his Divine authority, would have attributed his revival to artful contrivance or demoniacal agency; while philosophical sceptics, and those who in their zeal to overturn religion scruple not to raise the power of nature beyond all

experience, would still deny the record, or ascribe what was related to physical causes. Had the resurrection been as public as the transit of the Israelites through the sea, the incredulity of those who think little and study less, would neither have been moderated by the splendour of the transaction, nor removed by the number of the witnesses. Even in that case attempts would not have been wanting to account for the phenomenon by hypothetical reasoning, or to disprove the relation altogether, as the perversion of a natural incident to superstitious purposes. But when we consider the manner in which Jesus suffered, the watchfulness of the Romans, and the jealousy of the Jews, we shall find that deception was impossible, and that the persons to whom our Lord manifested himself, could neither have contrived a plot of this kind, nor have carried it into effect. The instruments and circumstances were such as human policy would have rejected in devising or managing a scheme, upon the success of which the lives and credit of so many persons depended. Instead of selecting men of sagacity and of an enterprising disposition, to announce his revival, our Saviour chose to confer that privilege on Mary Magdalene and other holy women who had followed him to his crucifixion and ministered to him in his agonies. All this was so completely the reverse of craft, that those who judge of the fitness of actions by the maxims of worldly wisdom, would not scruple to call it a very simple mode of proceeding. The disciples themselves were so little inclined to credit the strange account which these pious females brought, that though some of them wondered at the removal of the body, yet the fact of its reanimation appeared to them as no better than "an idle tale." This incredulity continued till a late hour of that memorable day; for when two of our Lord's followers went to Emmaus, which was somewhat more

than seven miles from Jerusalem, they conversed with much sadness upon the melancholy events that had lately occurred. On the road these travellers were accosted by a stranger, who perceiving the earnestness of their conversation, and the sorrow impressed upon their countenances, gently inquired the cause of their grief. As it was now the dusk of the evening, they did not recognize the features of this person, but there was something in his discourse that interested them exceedingly, though they were at a loss to account for their feelings. It seemed, however, very singular to them that he should be unacquainted with the history of their Lord, and one of them, whose name was Cleophas, entered freely into a detail of the character of Jesus, his sad catastrophe, the hopes that had been entertained concerning his being the Redeemer of Israel, and concluding with an account of the wonderful report which the holy women had given to the disciples, of having been favoured with a vision of angels, by whom they were informed that he was alive.

When Cleophas had finished his narrative, the stranger made some severe remarks upon the want of faith which the disciples had shown in a matter of so much moment, and when they ought to have known that the kingdom of the Messiah was to be preceded by his suffering. Of this he convinced his hearers by expounding the Scriptures in regular order, from the writings of Moses to those of the prophets, with so much power, that on their arrival at the village, the travellers intreated this wonderful Person to tarry with them in the house, which most probably belonged to one of them; and their request they urged because the day was far spent. With this invitation the stranger complied; but when they sat down to supper, the eyes of the disciples, which had hitherto been holden, were opened, and they perceived that it was Jesus, who immediately withdrew.

Here a difficulty is supposed to perplex the narrative, owing to the want of recollection for so long a time, on the part of two persons who must have been well acquainted with the features and the voice of the Divine Teacher. But the same cause which hindered Mary Magdalene from distinguishing her Lord in the garden that very morning, would as obviously prevent these disciples from observing narrowly the countenance of a passenger on the high road at a late hour. Still, according to their own account, it appears that they were greatly affected by his speech while they walked with him, and that this indescribable sympathy was occasioned not only by what he said, but by the peculiarity of his manner. When, however, we reflect that these men were slow to believe what was related by their friends, and that they were also in that state of despondency which absorbs the mental powers, it is not at all surprising, that, while they were agitated by our Saviour's dignified behaviour and eloquence, it never once occurred to them that this was Jesus, till they knew it by an act which produced instantaneous conviction. On making this discovery, the two travellers, without fear or delay, arose and hastened back to the city, that they might impart the glad tidings to their brethren. From this beautiful history we learn the advantage of religious conversation, the benefit of receiving instruction even from strangers, and the duty of communicating the information that we obtain in things belonging to the kingdom of God, unto those who are heirs with us of the same promises. The resurrection of Christ will be our condemnation, if it does not produce in us this active faith; but when the eyes of our understanding are opened to discern the sacrifice which he made for our transgressions, then shall we feel the quickening energy of his Spirit raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; "for none of us liveth to himself,

and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

DECEMBER THE FOURTEENTH.

INCREDULITY OF THOMAS.

John, xx. 29.—*Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

THE backwardness of the disciples to believe the resurrection of their Master, shows that they were neither deceivers nor enthusiasts; for if the business had been a contrivance to elevate the character of Jesus, it would have borne all the marks of union and co-operation in those who were the witnesses of it; and had they been men of credulous tempers, they would gladly have received the first intimation of a fact which opened to them the most pleasing prospects. It is allowed on all hands, that the followers of our Lord were prepossessed with an expectation that he would establish a glorious kingdom upon earth; and of this we are certain, that the delusive idea kept fast hold of their minds even to the night of his apprehension. Now, trusting as they did, that this was the promised restorer of Israel, it was reasonable to suppose that they would have eagerly attended to an account which was calculated to revive that hope and to give it a degree of positive certainty. These men had seen the elements controuled, the laws of gravitation suspended, and the power of death subdued, by the mere will of this Divine Person. They had also heard him declare

that his sufferings were necessary to the work of redemption which he came to accomplish ; but notwithstanding all this, and the assurances which he gave that he would rise again, the Apostles remained nearly the whole of the first day of the week wondering at what the women had said, but believing them not. Nay, some of the number still continued in a pertinacious denial of the truth, even when the travellers returned from Emmaus, and informed their brethren that they had seen and conversed with their risen Lord. At this time Jesus came himself into the assembly to dispel the doubts of his disciples ; but the degree of scepticism that had prevailed among them before this complete conviction, may be inferred from the obstinacy with which even the concurrent testimony of ten of the Apostles and other unexceptionable witnesses, was resisted by one who happened to be absent on this occasion. No circumstance could be more clearly proved or attested than the fact of the resurrection, when the congregation at Jerusalem enjoyed the actual presence of the Saviour in the midst of them, and each member was called to an examination of his person. To every reasonable mind the matter was now put beyond all doubt, and yet there was one man who refused his assent to what was established by the separate testimony of his friends, and who even set up his own judgment in opposition to the united experience of an entire assembly. Philosophical sceptics could hardly carry their opposition to truth farther than Thomas did ; for he was resolved to admit nothing in this case but the immediate evidence of his own senses. The condescension of our Lord in complying with the demand of this captious and wayward disciple, was perfectly agreeable to that benignity and forbearance which uniformly distinguished him during the whole period of his residence among men. But his reappearance evinced

somewhat more than the reality of his victory over death, for it was a demonstrative proof of his omniscience and the ubiquity of his spirit. By thus coming to give Thomas the satisfaction he desired, the Redeemer made that truth obvious which he afterwards explicitly imparted in the form of a promise, for the comfort of his disciples and the perpetual edification of his church: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." The Apostle who had been hitherto so obstinate in rejecting the testimony of his brethren, was now persuaded, not only that his Lord was risen from the grave, but that it was by his own almighty power, which appeared in his perfect acquaintance with the privacies of conversation and the secrets of the human heart. It was not the sight of his Master, nor the handling of his wounds, that so much affected the mind of Thomas, as the conviction of the grand principle, that the essential Divinity was united to the humanity of Jesus. This drew from the overpowered and joyful spirit of the awakened disciple, the elevated and emphatic confession, "My Lord, and my God." No amplification of language or enumeration of attributes could equal this solemn and energetic address, in which the worshipper professed his entire submission to Jesus, as the Creator of the universe and his King, as the Sovereign of all things and his Saviour. But however full and excellent this declaration might be, it was received with uncommon coldness, and the person who made it was rather censured for the littleness, than commended for the greatness of his faith. "Thomas," said our Lord, "because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

The peculiar justness and propriety of this reproof will be evident, when we consider that religious faith is not an indolent perception, but a moving principle

or an active exertion of the mind, seeking after truth with avidity, examining testimonies with impartiality, and submitting gladly to the demonstration of the Spirit, even where human reason is unable to account for what is revealed. Now in all this the Apostle was deficient; for he neither attended to the accounts given by his brethren with candour, nor investigated them with that care and diligence which the importance of the matter required. Thomas rashly set up his own judgment in opposition to the solemn assertion of many credible witnesses, who could not be deceived themselves, and who had no interest in imposing upon another. Besides this, the unbelieving disciple went so far as to demand higher proof of the fact than the nature of the case required, or than could properly be afforded, either at that particular time or at any future period. The confession of Thomas, then, was the result of sensible experience, and not of sedulous inquiry; so that it fell far short of the religious persuasion which is produced by the love of truth and a diligent use of all the means by which it may be obtained. The blessing promised by our Lord to those who should believe in his resurrection, without having any other knowledge of the fact than what they derive from the testimony of others, is so far from being any recommendation of an implicit faith, that it denotes the direct contrary, and plainly extends to those only who make a proper use of their faculties in the examination of the evidences, and in studying the record which God hath given of his Son. From this history, then, we learn that it is our duty to be as industrious in religious matters as in those of a temporal nature; and that, while we assert the freedom of the human mind in its investigation of subjects connected with eternal happiness, it becomes us also to do this with humility, and to be thankful for every direction and communication by which we

may be improved in wisdom and virtue. By thus exercising our powers in a constant application to the revealed will of God, "our faith will be found more precious than gold that perisheth, at the second appearing of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls." 1 Pet. i. 7—9.

DECEMBER THE FIFTEENTH.

THE DIVINE COMMISSION.

Matt. xxviii. 19.—Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

IF an indifferent person had heard these words when they were originally spoken, he would have surveyed the assembly with astonishment, wondering how it was possible that a command of so extensive an import could possibly be executed, especially by a body of men who were mean in appearance and destitute of learning. The doctrine which they were to teach was not only new to the nations, but repugnant to the native prejudices and established practices of all, annulling the ceremonial institute of the Jew, in which he placed his glory, and overturning the licentious polytheism of the Gentile, which had for its support the power of governments, the influence of philosophy, and the craft of an interested priesthood. Yet were these obscure and unlettered disciples of Jesus enjoined to "go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature;" though they had seen their Master himself vilified and persecuted, reduced to the most

wretched state of misery, and put to death in a manner which was peculiarly odious, and generally considered as infamous. They knew indeed that he was risen again, but how could they convince others of that most extraordinary fact, or in what manner were they to proceed in establishing the proof, that a person who had taken no measures to save himself from the malice of his enemies, and from the excruciating horrors of the cross, had yet, by his own Divine energy, conquered death and resumed all the functions of life? Here surely were difficulties of no common magnitude, and such as to the judgment of man must have presented insuperable obstacles in the way of the Apostles, who were neither men of great natural fortitude nor skilled in those arts which might compensate for the want of learning, the favour of the great, and the good will of the people. The Divine Speaker informed them that he was now in possession of all power, by virtue of which he sent them forth in the vast concern of converting the nations, with a particular promise, that he would be always with them and their successors, even unto the end of the world: but it required more faith than any that could be produced by human wisdom, virtue, or confidence, to embark in a cause of this immense magnitude, even with such an assurance. That they did go forth in obedience to this injunction, and that they succeeded in the great work to which they were appointed, cannot be denied; for, within a short space after the ascension, the religion of Jesus had made its way not only over Judea and the neighbouring countries, but into the polished cities of Greece, and to the very heart of the Roman empire. Ancient systems, though upheld by the state, were shaken to the foundation, and fell at last before a doctrine which had nothing to recommend it but the innate force of truth, being equally opposed to the pride of the learned and the practices of

the vulgar. The Gospel confounded the wisdom of the one and corrected the licentiousness of the other, and yet philosophers submitted to its dictates, while the people pressed willingly to the laver of regeneration. This mighty revolution could be effected by nothing short of the Divine energy operating by feeble instruments upon the hearts of men, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto the service of God. The Gospel of Christ did indeed produce a new creation wherever it came, and the rite by which the converts were admitted into the bosom of the church was an expressive symbol of their regeneration. As the waters of Noah obliterated the vestiges of the old world, so does the washing of regeneration take away the condemnation under which we were placed by the fall; and hence baptism is called "a death unto sin and a new life unto righteousness;" because by it we are brought into communion with God the Father, through the incarnation of his Son and by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. The formulary for the administration of this ordinance was fixed by an immutable rule, and the Apostles themselves were not left to the exercise of any discretionary power in the discharge of this duty; for as there is but "one Lord," so is there but "one faith, and consequently but one baptism." Eph. iv. 5. The believing nations were to be received into the new covenant in the name of three Persons in the Divine essence, of equal power, and differing only in their relative capacity. It is not said that the objects of the apostolical ministry were to be baptized in the names, but only in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; to show that there is a personal distinction in the Divinity, but that the nature is the same, and that the whole "three Persons are coeternal together, and coequal." Such was the faith which the converted Gentiles received

from their inspired instructors, and which they were required to profess on being admitted to the privileges of the new covenant. This doctrine then is far from being a mere speculative notion, which men may believe or reject at their pleasure; for it is the very foundation of the Christian church, and comprehends all that is necessary to be known and practised by those who have been admitted into that holy community. By this act we are united to each of the three Divine Persons in the same solemn manner, and therefore we are bound to love and serve God as our Father, the Son as our Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost as our Sanctifier. Higher information than this we cannot expect to attain in the present state, where we see through a glass darkly; nor is it expedient that we should be acquainted with any more of this mystery than what immediately concerns ourselves. Accordingly we read, that when man fell under the sentence of eternal death, God the Father mercifully vouchsafed to give his only begotten Son, that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" that the Divine Word engaged to assume the human nature, that he might fulfill all righteousness, and make by his death a perfect satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; to render which sacrifice effectual, the Holy Spirit undertook the office of awakening sinners to a sense of their misery, of guiding believers into the way of all truth, of strengthening the weak, comforting the afflicted, restoring those who have erred, and building up the whole by the distribution of various gifts and graces into a habitation of God. Thus the form of baptism is a summary of all divine and practical knowledge, which it becomes us seriously to consider as laying us under peculiar obligations to the three Persons in the Godhead who have covenanted for our redemption; therefore we shall do well in turning the whole into a

prayer for our edification, that the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, may be with us all evermore. Amen."

DECEMBER THE SIXTEENTH.

THE ASCENSION.

Mark, xvi. 19.—So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

Our blessed Saviour having finished his personal ministry upon earth, and provided for the continuance and increase of his church, prepared the disciples for the accomplishment of that declaration which he made on the morning of his revival from the tomb, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." John, xx. 17. The work of redemption was now complete, "Mercy and Truth had met together, Righteousness and Peace had kissed each other;" the mediatorial kingdom being therefore commenced, the great Reconciler, after leaving a charge with his witnesses, that they should remain at Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high, was taken from them in the act of benediction, and sat down on the right hand of God. According to the circumstantial account given by another Evangelist, we find that the Apostles were still in expectation that their Master would erect a glorious establishment in this world, which idea was probably strengthened by his resurrection from the dead, and by his abode among them for the space of forty days after that astonishing event. When, therefore, by his appointment they were assembled on the holy Mount to behold

his departure, they fondly imagined that the intent of the meeting was to fulfill the great object of their desire, for so they signified in their address to Jesus, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" To this anxious question, which indicated the still imperfect state of their knowledge, they received an answer similar to what was given them when they sought for information concerning the exact period of the destruction of the Jewish state and the demolition of the temple; "and Jesus said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." Here it is observable that our Lord did not destroy their hopes by declaring that Israel, according to the Divine councils, should become utterly extinct and revive no more, even in a temporal capacity; from whence we may reasonably infer, that the restoration of the ancient people of God forms a part of the scheme of grace, though the time of their recovery is yet far distant. The error of the Apostles lay in being unreasonably curious concerning matters remote from their mission, and about purposes which were among the inscrutable decrees of Infinite Wisdom. These chosen messengers were told that it was their duty to wait for the special illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who would qualify them fully for the service in which they were engaged, by enlarging their understandings, and endowing them with power to explain all things necessary to be imparted concerning the kingdom of God. Thus, in the original formation of the church, a gradual progress of instruction was observed, and the Apostles themselves were made acquainted with the mystery of redemption by slow degrees. They who had the advantage of consulting the Saviour in person, were commanded to moderate their desires and to suspend their inquiries in some particulars, till the proper time should arrive for the

solution of those difficulties which perplexed their minds. Let this be a caution and an encouragement to Christians, teaching them to be diffident and patient, while they are diligent in studying the sacred oracles ; being assured that the Spirit of truth will make the darkest things clear to those who seek wisdom with humility, and who choose rather to be learners in the school of grace, than to set up as the instructors of others. When our Lord had finished his charge, he lifted up his hands and pronounced a blessing on the assembly, in which divine action he was separated from them, and carried with majestic splendour into heaven ; where, as our Mediator and Redeemer, he is seated at the right hand of God. Then was fulfilled the prophecy of the Psalmist, " Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Ps. cx. 1) ; and then was exhibited to the view of the heavenly hierarchies that which the prophet saw in the vision of the night, " One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him ; and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Dan. vii. 13, 14. By this assumption of the human nature into heaven, even of the identical body that was born of the Virgin, grew up unto manhood and suffered death on the cross, reanimated by that very soul which descended into hell, or the world of departed spirits, believers are comforted with the assurance, that as they have a prevalent Intercessor at the right hand of the Majesty on high, so " when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory." Col. iii. 4.

between the evangelical solemnities and those of the law, as well in the manner of their revelation as in the season of their occurrence. Thus the great sacrifice of expiation was offered at the precise time when the Jewish people were assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate their deliverance from bondage, and the Holy Ghost descended upon the chosen witnesses of man's redemption at the feast of Pentecost, which was instituted in gratitude for the blessing of harvest and to commemorate the giving of the law from Sinai. Seven weeks after the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, they were gathered round the mount of God to hear his statutes delivered with such tremendous majesty, that Moses himself was appalled by the awfulness of the spectacle. A thick cloud enveloped the mountain, peals of thunder shook the atmosphere, lightnings glared along the sky, and the ground trembled beneath the descended Divinity. On this occasion the foot of Sinai was fenced around, to keep intruders off from the sacred inclosure; so that even an inadvertent trespasser, whether man or beast, was to be put to death. This august, but terrible manner of proclaiming the moral law, was expressive of its immutability, and of the heavy judgments that would be incurred by those who violated its precepts. But then for the relief of the penitent, propitiatory sacrifices were commanded to be offered at certain seasons, and on particular occasions. The blood of the victims poured out at the altar, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat, was graciously admitted as an atonement for the sins of the worshippers, who were thereby relieved from the burden of guilt, and taught to rely upon Divine grace for pardon and acceptance. All this was nothing more than the shadow of good things to come; and, therefore, when the Mediator of the new covenant took his seat at the right hand of God, after fulfilling the law in all its exactions, and suffering the penalty due to our transgressions,

another dispensation succeeded, and the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles with a grandeur far exceeding even the magnificence which attended the promulgation of the decalogue. At that period "the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God; even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel." Ps. lxxiii. 8. But when the fulness of time came for the gathering of the nations into one community, the Comforter descended upon those who were to be the instruments of that work with a sensible display of glory and power, exhibited in a rushing sound like that of a mighty wind, and cloven tongues of flame resting upon their heads. The former emblem was expressive of the quickening energy of the Spirit in the moral creation correspondent to what took place at the organization of the primeval chaos, and the reduction of the discordant mass into a state of regularity and beauty. In the vision of Ezekiel the same thing was figured by the action of the wind coming at the call of the prophet, and imparting life to the bodies which had just been brought into form, after being reduced to the condition of bones only, and those mixed together in one vast and confused heap. The wind which filled the house where the Apostles were assembled, was a pledge that the gifts about to be conferred upon them should be effectual in the conversion of the Gentile world; and that those who had been hitherto dead in trespasses and sins would, by their preaching, be made partakers of eternal life. What was thus typically represented, actually came to pass; for the sound of these inspired messengers went into all the earth, and their words were heard at the extremities of the known world. (Rom. x. 18.) The fiery tongues were appropriate representations of that power with which the disciples were immediately endued of speaking in various languages, according to the circumstances of their hearers, without

premeditated study or imperfection of utterance. But this last symbol had yet another, and a more general meaning; for as fire was used in the propitiatory sacrifices for the consumption of the offerings, the Spirit, by his teaching, purges the mind from earthly affections, gives liberty to the will, and illumination to the understanding. To be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, is to have the old man so destroyed within us, that the image of God may be renewed in our minds, and his law become the ruling principle of our conduct. Thus the emblematic appearance by which the gift of tongues was introduced, had a double signification, pointing out the miraculous manner in which the Gospel would be promulgated, and the powerful effects which it should have upon the hearts and lives of believers. The supernatural privileges and endowments which excited the wonder of the multitude at Jerusalem, have indeed long since ceased; but the operation of the Divine Spirit still continues, with equal efficacy, for the edification of the church and the sanctification of its members. Of this we are assured, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" so that an outward profession of the truth, and even a minute acquaintance with its principles, added to a great zeal for its advancement, will profit us nothing without "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Tit. iii. 5. Our Lord thought proper to insist upon this truth in his discourse with the Jewish professors who visited him at night, to enquire into the particulars of his doctrine. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," said Jesus to Nicodemus, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" by which the ruler was taught, that the mind and affections of the wisest of men must be renewed before he can be qualified to become a subject of the Messiah, whose service is perfect freedom.

DECEMBER THE EIGHTEENTH.

THE COUNSEL OF GAMALIEL.

Acts, v. 38, 39.—*And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.*

WE have here the language of a wise and prudent man, in an assembly of zealots; but what is more remarkable, the counsel of this judicious senator was attended to by his brethren, though their sentiments were different, and they had little disposition either to hear reason or to act with liberality. The influence of authority, however, sometimes produces moderation in the conduct of the most intemperate; and merit in high stations, is sure to command respect, even where men have no inclination to imitate the persons whom they admire. This is the reward of virtue, and the homage which it receives in an unbelieving age, from those who have no integrity themselves, but who would at least obtain the credit of esteeming superior wisdom and rectitude, and of living on terms of friendship with persons of a distinguished reputation. Such was the case in the present instance; for when the council at Jerusalem were irritated by the preaching of the Apostles, and resolved to put them to death, the mild, but firm, remonstrance of one reasonable man diverted the bigots from their malevolent purpose. Gamaliel was a Pharisee, and an expounder of the law; in which capacity, as well as for his exemplary deportment, he was held in great reverence by the people. But the popularity which he had acquired, was no more than what he justly deserved, both on account of his talents

and his application of them ; for when such a man as the apostle Paul laid a stress upon his having been bred up at the feet of Gamaliel, it was a plain indication of the merit of the tutor and of the gratitude of the pupil. Of the wisdom of this celebrated teacher, however, no stronger proof could well be adduced than the advice which he gave to the violent party of his own persuasion ; when, to prevent the increase of a growing faith, they were about to pass an iniquitous sentence against the preachers, who had freely told them that "they would obey God rather than man." The rulers and instructors of the Jewish nation could not but confess that an astonishing miracle had been wrought by Peter and John, in healing a lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple ; for the fact was notorious to the whole city. But on that occasion the council deemed it prudent to dismiss the Apostles, with a charge to cease from preaching to the people in the name of Jesus ; which those faithful servants were so far from promising, that they honestly declared their resolution to persevere in the same course, as men who had received an express command from God for that purpose. That they possessed this authority, which raised them above the decrees and ordinances of human legislatures, with respect to matters of pure conscience and of a spiritual nature, was manifest by the extraordinary powers with which they were endowed. An assembly, therefore, which consisted of men who, by their religion and statutes, were bound to consider the power of working of miracles and the gift of prophecy, as evidences of a divine mission, were inexcusable in condemning those who possessed those qualifications in a degree superior even to Moses. But so far were the majority of the elders from recognizing a principle affecting the foundation of their polity and religion, that they took counsel to put the Apostles

to death, while at the same time they acknowledged that actions had been performed by them which were beyond all art, and the character of which as clearly denoted the divine power as any that marked the works of the prophets of old. Gamaliel had discernment enough to see this; and, what was more, he had the candour to declare the conviction of his mind upon this important fact in the midst of the sanhedrim, though he was sensible that the rest of the members were in favour of violent measures. Gamaliel had not only truth on his side; but, what was of equal moment in this case, he enjoyed the confidence of the people to such a degree, that they regarded him as an oracle; the council, therefore, were obliged to pay a deference to his judgment, whatever opinion they might have of his reasoning. The wonderful cures wrought at Jerusalem by the disciples, had attracted great admiration, and increased the number of believers; so that to have destroyed twelve men who were beneficial to their fellow-citizens, would of itself have been an odious proceeding; but should it have been known, that in doing this the government had acted in opposition to the decision of the most venerable person among them, it might have raised a general commotion. Such, no doubt, were the feelings of the rulers and their motives, in yielding to the arguments of their associate; for the moderation which he recommended was far from being agreeable to their eager tempers and vindictive principles. The reasoning of Gamaliel was indeed most conclusive; for nothing could be plainer than the inference, that if the faith which had occasioned so much alarm, were not of God, it would come to nought, destitute as it was of all human aid, and having no other instruments for its propagation but a few poor, obscure, and naturally unlettered men. It is evident that the works wrought by the Apostles had made a deep

impression upon this learned professor, and that he was at least disposed to consider them as the signs of some stupendous change which the Almighty was about to effect in the state of Israel, and the condition of the moral world. Gamaliel, however, judiciously debated the matter in a way more likely to affect his hearers and to calm their apprehensions. He enforced his argument in behalf of forbearance and an attention to the movements of Providence, by illustrations drawn from circumstances within their own immediate recollection, of impostors who had occasioned much disturbance, and yet they and their cause came to nothing. "Refrain, therefore," said he, "from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God." With this advice the council complied, and thus the Divine goodness was made apparent in the preservation of the Apostles, by the interposition of one whose authority the rest of the rulers could not but respect; while the public, when they became acquainted with his reasoning, must, from their habitual veneration of the man, have conceived a still more favourable regard for the persons whom he had protected. The counsel of Gamaliel contains an admirable lesson against rash judgment and uncharitable censure, with respect to the character of those who differ from us in religious opinions. But it follows not, that because we should be moderate in our sentiments and liberal in our conduct towards all men, we ought also to be indifferent to their doctrines. Moderation in this sense would be criminal, as being a manifest indication of an indifference to the truth; no part of which must be relinquished or modified out of complaisance to the feelings and persuasions of others. The firmness of the Apostles must be our pattern in this respect; and when we are called

upon by those who are the enemies of our faith to exercise liberality, which is in other words no more than to betray the cause we are bound to defend, it becomes us to reply, in the language of the disciples to the Jewish assembly, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts, iv. 19, 20.

DECEMBER THE NINETEENTH.

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

Acts, vii. 59.—*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

THE advice of Gamaliel produced peace to the church for a season, and gave the Apostles a considerable advantage in their ministry; for we are told, that "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." But their cares increased by success; and the enjoyment of tranquillity, while it enlarged the sphere of their operation, occasioned them some disquietude. In all human relations imperfections will be found, and the best societies will sometimes be disturbed by jealousy and discontent. Thus it was in the infant church, where the means adopted to preserve harmony had nearly caused violent contention and bitter strife. As the primitive believers worshipped in one place, so they composed one fraternity, and had all things in common. The rich sold their possessions and brought the produce into the treasury, out of which the poor were supplied with necessities, and by which the public tables, where all partook alike every day, were supported. When the number of

converts multiplied, the management of these concerns was in a great measure left to the discretion of persons, in whose fidelity full confidence was placed by the superiors of the congregation. But at length mistrust arose on the part of the Greek proselytes, who alleged that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. What cause there might be for this dissatisfaction does not appear; but it shows the piety which prevailed among these believers, that they did not so resent the partiality that was manifested by the Jewish converts, as to separate from the community on that account. Instead of quarrelling with their brethren, or objecting to the economy which had been instituted, these persons stated their grievances to the Apostles, who pursued a course that was well calculated to redress the complaint and to prevent its recurrence. At their desire the assembly chose seven men of esteemed character, who, being set apart by prayer and imposition of hands, were entrusted with the direction of the temporal affairs of the society, and constituted assistants to the Apostles in the work of the ministry. The chief of these deacons was Stephen, of whose country and condition we have no account in the Sacred History; though, from his name and associates, it should seem that he was a Hellenist, by which was meant one who was a Jew in religion but a Gentile by descent. This conjecture is strengthened by the description of the enemies at whose instigation he received the crown of martyrdom. For the accommodation of foreign believers who resorted to Jerusalem, there were numerous synagogues in that city, and among these the gifts of Stephen were exercised with such power as to provoke the malice of those who could not stand the force of his arguments. He was "a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost;" which character he sustained by his energy in preaching the Gospel and confuting its gainsayers; who,

vexed by the loss of such a member and enraged by his eloquence, proceeded to accuse him before the council as a blasphemer, and one that endeavoured to subvert the government. In support of this charge they suborned witnesses, who represented the reasoning of Stephen on the extent of the Messiah's kingdom, as an attempt to corrupt the loyalty of the people. This false accusation led the martyr to that line of defence which he adopted, of enumerating the principal facts of the Jewish history, from the calling of Abraham to the death of Christ, to whom the patriarchal and legal dispensations typically referred, and whose coming was foretold by the prophets. Irritated by this evangelical application of their records, the council had no hesitation in condemning Stephen, according to the form of execution ordained in the Mosaic law against blasphemers; which is a proof that the Jewish nation still retained the power of punishing the transgressors of their own laws, even in capital cases. How unworthy they were of this privilege, and how justly they fell under that judgment which speedily deprived them of all political power, was apparent in the behaviour of this assembly of persecutors, who laid aside the gravity of the judicial character, to vent their fury upon a person for differing from them upon a question that required the most deliberate investigation. The outrage became more violent when the prisoner declared, that he saw the opened heavens, and "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." The members of the council were at no loss in comprehending the meaning of the martyr; for what he said corresponded with the answer which our Lord gave to the adjuration of the high-priest, who demanded whether he was the Messiah. "I am," was the reply; "and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Mark,

xiv. 62. These doctors were not so ignorant of their religion as to understand these expressions in any other sense than that of assuming, on the part of Jesus, the attributes of Divinity. They knew that the Son of Man denoted the incarnate Word, and that the right hand of Power was his peculiar dignity, as the Saviour of his people, their Mediator, and their King. This they knew because it occurred repeatedly in their prophetic books, and particularly in that collection of hymns which constituted their liturgy; and in which they met with this sublime representation, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Ps. cx. 1. When Stephen, therefore, affirmed that he had a clear view of that Majesty, his judges were sensible that he ascribed to Jesus the honour due unto the Son of the Blessed, and they immediately rushed upon the Saint with the utmost violence, for having transferred the glory of the Divinity to one who had been crucified. This was the pretended blasphemy for which the holy confessor suffered; and, to put the matter out of all doubt, he died proclaiming aloud his faith in the essential deity of his Master, to whom he committed his soul in the moment of his martyrdom, "invocating and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Our translators have injudiciously inserted the word, God, in this prayer, contrary to the letter of the original, which is one entire address to the Divine inhabitant of the Shechinah, whose transcendent glory was manifested to the disciple, for his own comfort and the edification of his church. Here the Saviour appeared in the same splendour with which he was clothed when the prophet Isaiah beheld his glory, and spake of him, saying, "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Ch. vi. 5. Thus Stephen sealed with his blood the truth which he defended in the synagogues and maintained before the council;

but the effects of this doctrine were farther displayed in the benignity of his disposition and the charitable return which he made to his enemies, for whom he prayed in his last agonies, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." So died the first martyr of the Christian church, imitating the Redeemer in his resignation and benevolence, as he had endeavoured to copy him in the ardour of his zeal and the purity of his conversation. "Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth most easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. xii. 1, 2.

DECEMBER THE TWENTIETH.

THE ETHIOPIAN CONVERT.

Acts, viii. 39.—*And he went on his way rejoicing.*

THE blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and the storms raised for the destruction of the truth have always contributed to its advancement. Thus it was when the enemies of righteousness exulted over the remains of the blessed Stephen; for, while that unnatural triumph increased their fury against the Gospel, many of the disciples were in consequence driven for shelter into the neighbouring states, where they preached the word with abundant success. Among those who were compelled to leave Jerusalem was Philip; one of the seven deacons; from whence we learn, that as it is no part of the Christian's duty to run into danger, so it behoves him to

consult prudence for his personal safety in the time of trouble. Accordingly Philip, finding that his services were limited by the persecution, retired to Samaria, where he had ample liberty to exercise his gifts, and the satisfaction of seeing his labours repaid with a joyful harvest. While he was thus employed in a fruitful field, he received the Divine command to go into the desert; and though the reason of the injunction was kept from his knowledge, the faithful minister made no scruple of compliance, but arose and went as he was directed. To him who studies the will of God in all things, no precept is severe, even when it calls for great exertions and the sacrifice of many enjoyments. Philip had, no doubt, formed some tender connexions in Samaria; yet he did not stop to take leave of his friends, but hastened with alacrity to discharge his duty, in pious submission to the order of Providence. On arriving at the place appointed he beheld the equipage of a traveller, whose appearance indicated that he was one of no ordinary rank. This person was the high-treasurer of Ethiopia, returning from Jerusalem to his own country; but the man of God, with the characteristic humility of true piety, kept at a distance from the train, being neither curious to inquire into the condition of the nobleman, nor ambitious of courting his acquaintance. In obedience, however, to the same authority which guided him from Samaria, Philip drew near to the chariot, where he perceived the stranger reading the prophecy of Isaiah. A statesman so devoting his leisure hours must, even at that period, have been an agreeable spectacle to the serious observer. In our times such a sight would perhaps produce different sensations; and though it is not to be expected that men of high rank should render themselves conspicuous by reading the Bible in their carriages, they may learn, at least, from this example to make an edifying use of

their time, and in particular to respect religion by their public deportment. This Ethiopian nobleman undertook a perilous journey for the purpose of worshipping God at Jerusalem; and on his return he exercised himself in the Holy Oracles, with an ardent desire to become acquainted with their meaning and application. But in an age when the Gospel has irradiated both hemispheres, those who should be careful in setting a laudable example to others, treat religion as if it was designed only for political convenience, or calculated to keep the lower orders in a state of regularity. Hence it is that the day which has been set apart to the worship of the Most High, and the cessation from labour, is chosen in Christian countries as the most convenient season for travelling. One consequence of this profanation of the divine institution has been, as is usual in all cases where the influence of the great prevails, that the abuse of the sabbath has descended from the upper ranks to the lowest; so that our public roads present no other distinction in the several days of the week than this, that the one which ought to carry most signs of outward reverence, wears the greatest appearance of dissipation. With such persons, it is to be feared, ancient instances of piety will have but little effect, especially when the uniform example of the highest earthly order, though shining among us for above half a century, has failed to correct the evil, or to inspire us with the love of religion for the sake of its benefits. The high-treasurer of Ethiopia was not more careful of his time and anxious for its improvement, than he was courteous to strangers and thankful for information. When Philip heard him read that affecting chapter of Isaiah, in which the sufferings of the Messiah are minutely described, he said, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Such a question would to some haughty minds have savoured of rudeness, par-

ticularly in one of the preacher's mean appearance. But the nobleman received it with great complacency, and replied, "How can I, except some man would guide me?" He was not ashamed to confess his ignorance, even to a passenger of low condition; and perceiving by the manner of Philip, that he was conversant with the subject which at that time interested his feelings, he desired him to take a place in the chariot. There the zealous disciple preached the Gospel, by applying to Jesus Christ the whole of that prophetic picture, about which the nobleman was so desirous of information. The evangelical expositor did not suppress any part of the truth for fear of giving offence to his auditor; and the prime minister of Ethiopia was so far from being shocked with the description of a crucified Saviour, that he eagerly solicited baptism, and embraced the doctrine of the cross with gratitude. Like the merchant in the parable, who had travelled far in the search of eternal life, he rejoiced on finding the pearl of great price; and though it required the sacrifice of every other hope of acceptance, for the faith of Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, he made no hesitation, but received that salvation with gladness, which was "a stumbling-block to the Jew, and to the Greek foolishness." On his return to his own country this gracious convert distinguished himself as a zealous preacher of the religion of Jesus; and became the founder of a church, which subsists, though greatly fallen from its original simplicity, to the present day. Thus was realized that prediction which stands connected with the description of the suffering Redeemer, in the prophecy that engaged the attention of this eminent person: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on

the right hand and on the left ; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." Is. liv. 2, 3.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE CONVERSION OF PAUL.

Acts, ix. 20.—*And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

THIS remarkable history is a striking illustration of the view of Providence drawn by the Psalmist, " Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee : the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." Ps. lxxvi. 10. If the evil passions of men are suffered to spread terror in the world, and to multiply the troubles of the righteous, there is a power secretly following their violent career, and turning the whole to the Divine glory, and the benefit of distant ages. When the Jewish rulers were resolved to destroy the Apostles, the advice of Gamaliel diverted them from their purpose ; and thus the goodness of God was made manifest in preserving the lives of his witnesses till they should have finished the work to which they were called. This tranquil season was improved to the organization of the church and the instruction of its members, particularly of those who were to be employed in the propagation of the Gospel. But the increase of converts excited the jealousy of the unbelievers, whose thirst of blood was enraged rather than satiated by the martyrdom of Stephen. Desponding minds would have been ready to give up all for lost when the infant society was assailed by numerous enemies, armed with power, who entered private houses, and dragged to prison all who were suspected of being the disciples of Christ. The Apostles indeed

remained, but the community gathered by their labours, appeared to have been dissolved without any prospect of a restoration; and yet all this, which in the judgment of short-sighted man rendered the cause of religion hopeless, proved the reverse: for, while the tempest raged in Judea, the truth made its way into the adjacent countries; and when measures were adopted to extend the persecution to other parts, Divine Wisdom chose the instrument employed for that purpose, as the most proper minister to make known the religion of Jesus among the Gentiles. The active agent in these proceedings was Saul, a native of Tarsus, but a Hebrew both on the side of his father and his mother. His profession was that of a Pharisee; and he did honour to the sect by his abilities and integrity; but his temper was ardent, and his zeal for the Mosaic institutions so vehement, that, unlike his master Gamaliel, he conceived it to be his duty to punish all innovators with the utmost severity. As this young man took part in the death of Stephen, he was probably present at the examination of the martyr, whose defence he must have heard: but neither that, nor the fortitude displayed by the saint in his last moments, produced any other effect on the mind of Saul than an eager desire to extirpate all who professed the Christian faith. In every other respect his character was irreproachable, and throughout the whole of his outrageous course he acted with a perfect consciousness of being right; thus affording a proof, that sincerity will not give a man acceptance with God, when he has neglected the means of salvation, and set himself in opposition to the truth. Should it be asked, in what his error consisted, the answer is obvious; in not attending dispassionately to the evidences of the Gospel, but trusting to his own judgment without inquiry, or exercising liberality to those who differed from him in opinion. But if this conduct was culpable in one who possessed the advantages of

learning, and whose duty it was to seek information with candour, the opposition of Saul was a virtue when compared with the treachery of those who endeavour to undermine the Christian faith, while they affect to admire its moral excellence. The infidelity of these persons sets the seal of obduracy upon their hearts and understandings; but the unbelief of Saul did not arise, like theirs, from a hatred of religion, and therefore he became a monument of the Divine mercy. In his zeal to root out the Gospel he seems to have outstripped the ardour of the council; for, on hearing that some believers had taken shelter at Damascus, he solicited and obtained a commission from the high-priest to make a search in that city after the disciples of Jesus, and to bring them bound to Jerusalem. But on the way he was arrested by a superior power, which burst from heaven with an awful splendour at noon-day. While the company lay prostrate, a voice from the heavenly glory addressed the chief in terms of gentle remonstrance; and when Saul replied, "Who art thou, Lord?" he received this answer, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Now this could be no illusion of the imagination, for the circumstance happened on a public road at an hour when the minds of men are busily engaged; and the phenomenon had the most unexceptionable witnesses, for they were devoted to the service of the Sanhedrim, and were adverse to the religion of Jesus. There was then no deception in the case; for the leader of the party became blind by the effulgence; and though lightning might produce that effect, it was not the character of the man to mistake the sound of thunder for a human voice. Saul heard himself called by name, and an explicit declaration followed, in which the Divine Speaker made known his dignity and the intent of his appearance. The Inhabitant of that light which surrounded the bush in Horeb for the purpose of appointing Moses to the direction of Israel, now revealed himself to the perse-

cutor of the church, that he might be qualified to bear testimony to the truth. Even the temporary loss of his sight had a symbolical allusion to his own mental blindness, and to the spiritual darkness that was to be dispelled by his labours. It was the constant language of this chosen vessel, that he had nothing in which he could boast, but that all the knowledge he possessed of the mystery of redemption was the gift of God, that he might "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Eph. iii. 8: As, therefore, his conversion had a particular object, it was attended with extraordinary circumstances, which have nothing to do with the general dealings of God towards sinners, who are left to the improvement of the means of grace under the ministry of the Word. Still this history is full of comfort and instruction, showing the goodness of the Saviour in turning threatened evils to the benefit of those who put their trust in his mercy; while the deportment of the converted persecutor affords an instance of the powerful change which the Gospel produces in the hearts and lives of men. The furious zealot who left Jerusalem with rage against Jesus and his followers, entered Damascus a sincere penitent; and the next account we hear of him is this, "Behold, he prayeth." It is not to be supposed that one so strict in the Jewish religion had hitherto lived a stranger to the forms of devotion; the contrary indeed is evident from the Apostles' own account, and therefore what is here related of him must be considered as referring to the matter of his prayer, and not to the mere exercise itself. He was now made to feel his sinfulness, and his want of that salvation which he had zealously opposed. This brought him upon his knees, and humbled him before God with supplications for pardon, a clearer knowledge of the Divine will, and grace to direct him in his future course. Such was the conversion of this distinguished person, who after wasting the church by his violence,

extended its borders by his labours, and sealed the truth with his blood, confirming his own declaration, "for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." 1 Tim. i. 16.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

CHARACTER OF CORNELIUS.

Acts, x. 1, 2.—There was a certain man in Cesarea, called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

SOME well-meaning persons have pronounced all warfare to be unlawful; and without making any allowance for the constitution of human nature, or the rights of mankind, they have condemned the military profession as being inconsistent with the Christian character. But so long as the world shall be made up of separate communities, jealousies and feuds will arise between neighbouring states, which no administration, however pacific, can allay without force. The weak will sometimes be injured by the strong, and the honest will be circumvented by the crafty. It is the duty, therefore, of all governments to make use of the means which they possess for the protection of their subjects; and the neglect to do this would be a violation of the institution, and the prelude to anarchy and dissolution. Our Divine Legislator has made no alteration in the civil construction of society; and while his system infuses the principles of truth and justice into all the relations of life, it leaves to men their national peculiarities, professions, and immuni-

ties. The Gospel is so far from proscribing war in a just cause, that the sacred writers have illustrated the various branches of Christian duty by imagery drawn from the operations of contending armies, the exercise of destructive weapons, and the conflicting energies of animated combatants. Such comparisons would not have been made, if the use of the sword was in all cases, and without any exception, forbidden; for exhortations to holiness, and the cultivation of the active virtues, are never clothed in phraseology borrowed from unlawful pursuits. As, therefore, the business of war, however painful it may be, is necessary, so is the military vocation honourable and agreeable to the ordinances of God, of which many proofs might be given from the catalogue of worthies, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Heb. xi. 33, 34. But that which ought to be considered as decisive in this case, is the authority of our Saviour, who thus expressed his admiration of a Roman commander: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Our Lord did not require of this man that he should relinquish his calling, but he sent him away with the grant of his petition, and a commendation of his piety. This surely is a high testimony in favour of the military character, and fully sufficient to show its consistency with the most exalted faith and the tenderest sentiments. But there is another instance still more deserving of our observation, because it is one that relates in an especial manner to the opening of the gate of life to the Gentile world. It was ordained that the covenant of peace should be made known to all men without the distinction of circumcision and uncircumcision; but this design was imperfectly understood by the Apostles;

and even Peter, to whom the keys, according to the figurative language of prophecy, were imparted for this purpose, had no idea of the privilege till the time came for the discharge of his commission. The person chosen to be the forerunner of the Gentiles in the reception of the Holy Ghost was a Roman officer, at the military station of Cesarea. Of the achievements of Cornelius we have no memorial ; but the portrait drawn of him by the Spirit of Truth raises him above all the splendour of military renown. We are told that he was "a devout man ;" not merely a good moral character, but one that feared God with all his house. As a soldier, he was careful to keep up good discipline in his family ; but what was more, he enforced the rules which he laid down by his own practice. Cornelius was an exact observer of the hours of prayer ; and to that exercise he added the duty of fasting, in conformity to the ritual of the Jewish religion, to which he was a convert. This good man was also distinguished by his charity, for he gave "much alms to the people ;" not out of ostentation, or to gain their good will, but from a principle of gratitude to the Author of his mercies, by whose grace he had been called out of heathen darkness to the knowledge of the truth. It is not to be supposed that one so pious could be ignorant of the Scriptures, and consequently he must have been acquainted with the promise of the Messiah, and of the blessings to be wrought out by him for the redemption of mankind. That he was one of those devout men who looked for salvation at this time, may be inferred from the address of the angel, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard." This is the Scriptural language for a gracious return to some particular request ; and what that petition was in the present case appears in the direction, "Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter : he lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side : he shall tell

thee what thou oughtest to do." It is therefore evident that this extraordinary man's request had for its object the knowledge of eternal life, which he sought with incessant application to the Fountain of Wisdom ; and when he was told by what means the information he desired was to be obtained, he made no delay, but sent off instantly two of his servants and a devout soldier to Joppa, as he was directed. In the mean time the Apostle was favoured with an emblematic vision setting before him the cessation of those distinctions which had for so many ages divided the several branches of the human family from each other. But the blood of the universal Sacrifice was now poured forth for the cleansing of all nations, and therefore it was high time that the mounds and barriers which kept the healing stream from its destined purpose should be removed. The privilege of commencing this great work was given to Peter ; and to prepare him for the exercise of it, he was instructed by a symbolical representation, showing that to " the Gentiles also was granted repentance unto life." On his arrival at Cesarea the Apostle was received with the greatest reverence by Cornelius, who had gathered his friends together in the true spirit of piety, that they might partake the blessed information which the servant of God had to communicate. Peter found an attentive and willing audience ; and thus the kingdom of Heaven was opened to the Gentiles by his ministry, and the sealing of the Holy Ghost. The first who entered were Roman soldiers, thereby figuring the success which the Gospel should obtain throughout the extent of that mighty empire whose power was felt over the known world. The progress of the conquerors made way for the milder, but more durable, dominion of the King of Righteousness, under whose government " there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek ; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." Rom. x. 12.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

DELIVERANCE OF PETER.

Acts, xii. 15.—Then said they, It is his angel.

THE contemplative mind, judging from what takes place in the present state, will readily believe that the scale of intelligence ascends in the same proportion that the chain of being is seen to graduate from the human intellect down to the lowest state of perception. He, therefore, who pursues this consideration with a grateful sense of the goodness displayed in the government of the universe, will not easily adopt the hypothesis of materialism, or say with the Sadducee of old and the philosophical sceptic of modern times, "there is neither angel nor spirit." On the contrary, he will be led to think that there is a close connexion between the visible and invisible worlds, similar to the dependence of one part of nature upon another; so that, while all act with perfect freedom, they are susceptible of an external impulse, the reason of which they cannot comprehend. This idea, which is rendered probable by all the discoveries of physical science, receives full confirmation from the Sacred Writings, where we learn the particulars of that economy which subsists in the order of creatures above us as far as concerns our immediate interest, for the purpose of animating us in the way of duty, and of supporting us in the time of trouble. Here we are informed that the hosts of God are as benevolent as they are numerous, that they excel in strength, and are continually employed in services of love to the heirs of salvation. Notwithstanding their exalted condition and capacious powers, the angels take a delight in studying the mystery of man's redemption; and the highest authority hath assured us that "there is joy among them when one sinner upon earth repenteth."

That these glorious spirits can, upon extraordinary occasions, render themselves visible and audible to our perceptions, is proved by numerous facts; and the man that is bold enough to deny the reality of such appearances because he cannot account for them by any known principles, has little claim to respect either for his wisdom or his piety. The Scriptures abound with relations of angelical visits, which can neither be controverted nor explained away without attacking the credit of revelation, and sinking it to the rank of legendary tradition. But if the notion be admitted, that all the accounts of such manifestations are no more than figurative embellishments, or the representation of ideal impressions on the mind, the consequence will be, that we can have no certainty of the facts with which they are connected. In this case, the agony of our Lord, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to heaven, may be classed among imaginary scenes; for in each of these events, the appearance of angelical beings was clearly marked and defined. Of the visible agency of these intelligences, and their interest in the affairs of men, we have a particular description in the history of the Apostle Peter, who being cast into prison by Herod Agrippa, had nothing in view but the same kind of death which that tyrant had a little before inflicted on James, the brother of John. The dungeon was strong, and well guarded by a body of soldiers, two of whom were stationed in the same room with the prisoner. But on the night preceding the appointed time of execution, a blaze of glory filled the place, and a heavenly Power awakened the Apostle, whose irons fell off, and he followed his guide to the gates of the prison, which opened of their own accord; and when Peter was completely at liberty, the angel departed from him. Now in all this there could neither be any contrivance nor deception: for the guards ran too great a risk to permit an escape, and there were too many of them to be im-

posed upon by any artifice. Nor was it possible for the prisoner himself to be deceived in what he saw and heard; for the celestial messenger by whom he was roused from his sleep, enjoined him to put on his sandals and his vest, and then conducted him to the open part of the city. All this was certainly beyond the power of imagination to perform; and had there been no real angel in the business, we should have read of none in the history; for the evangelical writers were remarkably studious of simplicity, and avoided every kind of figurative ornament in their narrations. When Peter was convinced that this was no illusion of the fancy, he repaired to the house where the brethren were assembled, but the servant being astonished at his appearance ran in, without opening the gate, to inform the company. The account which she brought seemed so incredible, that the whole congregation treated it as a mad person's dream; but when the damsel persisted in the truth of what she reported, they moderated their language, and said, "It is his angel." This is one of the few passages upon which the notion has been founded, that every man has a guardian spirit allotted to him at his birth, by whose suggestions he is preserved from mischief and directed to good, till by his own folly and the arts of the tempter he forfeits the blessing, and loses those helps which he had neither the grace to appreciate, nor the virtue to improve. But this conceit, which takes equally from the freedom of the human mind and the dignity of the celestial orders, is contrary to the course of Providence in the varieties of being that come within our cognizance. All that the Scriptures affirm on the subject of the connexion between mortals and immortals, is this: that the latter take a lively interest in whatever concerns our spiritual welfare; and that, in many instances, they are specially employed in averting evil and delivering men from danger. They are also observers of our actions, and they assist at our wor-

shipping assemblies ; so that this consideration should make us circumspect in our deportment, knowing that we are in the presence of those beings, with whom, if we study to be like them, we shall one day be associated. When the disciples said to the damsel, who maintained that she had heard the voice of Peter, " It is his angel," they either supposed that this was one of those ministering spirits who were occasionally sent to comfort the church below ; or, as is far more probable, they took it to be the departed soul of the Apostle himself, now become an angel of God. The last is the most obvious construction of the passage : for at this time the believers were in great trouble about the fate of their friend, who they knew was doomed to suffer death within a few hours. It was natural, therefore, for them, on hearing the report of the servant, to imagine first that her senses had deceived her ; and when they found that this was not the case, it was equally natural for them to exclaim, " It is his angel, or apparition." The persons who were now gathered together for the purpose of prayer to the great Head of the church, were not ignorant that the disembodied spirits of the saints are numbered with the hierarchies of glory ; for so their Divine Master had taught them, when, in refutation of the Sadducean infidelity, he said of his redeemed ones, " Neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." Luke, xx. 36. While this history gives us encouragement to rely, in every difficulty, upon the wisdom of Providence, knowing that all things work together for good to them that love God, the incident teaches us likewise to remember those who are in distress, that they may be delivered out of their troubles, and enabled to bear them with fortitude : for " the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James, v. 16.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

PAUL AND BARNABAS.

Acts, xv. 39.—And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.

PERFECTION is not in man, nor in any of his works. In many things we offend all; and this reflection on human infirmity should beget in us charity towards others, and a humble opinion of ourselves. The most exalted saints, whose characters are delineated in the pages of truth, had their defects, and fell into serious errors of conduct, which are faithfully recorded for our caution and direction. No attempts are made by the sacred historians to gloss over the imperfections of the early disciples and founders of the church; but, on the contrary, their timidity and want of faith, their jealousies and contentions, are minutely stated: so little did the followers of Christ seek to advance their reputation, or that of the doctrine which they preached, by setting up faultless examples as proofs of its efficacy. Of this scrupulous fidelity an instance occurs in the apostolical history, which having been written under the inspection of St. Paul, by one of his most intimate companions, must have received his entire approbation. That eminent servant of God was associated with Barnabas in the work of the ministry, by Divine appointment; and their labours were crowned with great success in various parts. But when Paul proposed to his colleague a second journey, for the purpose of confirming the churches which they had planted, a dissension arose between them with respect to the choice of an assistant. They were alike zealous to advance the common cause, and had an equal love for the believers who were called to the truth by their preaching; but

each possessed a particular attachment and opinion, which he was unwilling to relinquish; and the more the question was discussed, the wider the breach became; for Barnabas was determined, or resolutely bent, upon taking with them John, whose surname was Mark, which Paul objected to, because this disciple, on a former occasion, had left them in the midst of their labours. It is, therefore, by no means difficult to ascertain on which side the fault lay in this unpleasant dispute: for though the Apostle of the Gentiles appears to have been warm and positive in the business, he had evidently strong reasons for his opposition, since it was grounded upon the experience of Mark's want of steadiness, and an apprehension that a person who had once failed to support his friends in their work, might be tempted to do it again. The objection of Paul, therefore, proceeded from motives of prudence, and a due regard to the public welfare. Barnabas, on the contrary, it is to be feared, was governed by more contracted principles: for the companion whom he chose was his sister's son, and this affinity seems to have fixed the resolution of the good man, and to have rendered him so obstinate as to prefer a separation from his colleague rather than give up a point of comparatively little importance. From the language of the narrative we may clearly perceive which party was most contentious in this business: for while Barnabas "determined" that John should go with them, Paul thought it not good or advisable to take him, at the same time assigning candidly his reasons for having formed that unfavourable opinion. But arguments and facts availed nothing where an undue partiality on the one side, and perhaps some little resentment on the other, prevented both friends from adopting a conciliatory measure. Barnabas having the weakest cause, was, as is always the case, most vehement; and Paul, whose ardent temper was such that he could scarcely endure any want of zeal in others, judged, per-

haps, a little more severely of Mark than the young man really deserved. Thus, as in all points where personal feeling and the passions of men are suffered to prevail on questions of a public interest, the contention grew high; and these two bright ornaments of the church, who had moved in one sphere together for some years, with equal glory to themselves and benefit to the community, "parted asunder." But it is observable that this separation was over-ruled to the benefit of the Gospel, which became more generally diffused by the divided labours of these excellent persons, who, with all their imperfections, were animated by the same desire to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles. They differed only in the choice of means for accomplishing the great object which was nearest to their hearts; and though they departed asunder one from the other, they neither slackened in their efforts, nor made any alteration in doctrine, worship, or discipline. Though Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Silas, took different directions, they would all of them have shuddered at the thoughts of causing any dissension in the church, which is the body of Christ. While, therefore, this history teaches us to avoid all occasions of contention, and inculcates the duty of yielding to each other in matters of mere indifference, it does at the same time point out no less forcibly the obligation which all Christians are under, of holding the faith with firmness, and of promoting it with diligence. The incident before us shows, that as human nature remains imperfect in the best of men, it becomes us to watch over our tempers with vigilance, and to make every allowance for the weakness of our brethren, agreeable to the advice of the Apostle; "Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." Rom. xiv. 19.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

PAUL PREACHING AT ATHENS.

Acts, xvii. 30.—*And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent.*

How far it was possible for human reason to go in the discovery of religious truth, might be seen in the variety of opinions taught by the ancient philosophers, and the number of temples erected in honour of imaginary deities. If that object could have been ascertained any where, Athens was the most likely place in the world to have satisfied the inquirer; for here learning had fixed her seat, and all that art could perform or ingenuity devise, combined to gratify the taste and to exercise the judgment. But the state of morals and religion in this school of science was such as to afford an illustration of the remark, that "the world by wisdom knew not God." The number of divinities was prodigious, and yet new ones were continually added to the catalogue, some presiding over the elements and others regulating the seasons; one order interposing in the affairs of men, and another taking care of inferior animals: the very passions were appropriated to distinct powers, and the diseases were classed among the objects of worship; particular places had their protectors, and the various occupations of men were honoured with tutelary deities. Hence fanes and altars, oracles and images, abounded in all places, and at every turn the eye was struck with pompous processions, the smoke of sacrifices, and an endless diversity of ceremonies, which awed the vulgar without improving them, and which the philosophers connived at, because they had nothing

better to substitute in their room. These pretended enlighteners of the world were too much divided among themselves to oppose, with effect, the superstitious usages which most of them despised. The desire to extend their respective sects was not connected with any benevolent sentiment towards the body of the people, or the wish to better the condition of the poor. The Stoics and Epicureans hated each other, but both agreed in despising the mass of mankind, and leaving them to the management of the priests. While they affected to teach the most liberal principles, they encouraged popular errors; and even the best of the ancient sages, whose doctrines and manners far exceeded what was taught and practised by the rest of the philosophers, so far complied with the national customs, as to cause a sacrifice to be offered to the fancied protector of the healing art. Where the faith of the wisest man was so vitiated, the public morals could not be very correct. Their religion, indeed, laid no restraint on the evil propensities of men, and their instructors had no higher authority for enforcing order than the will of the magistrate. Immoralities of the grossest kinds were openly indulged, because the people were without any system of duties which could be regarded as sacred; and the examples of the beings worshipped by them, were more calculated to encourage licentiousness than to promote sobriety and good manners. Yet, amidst the vilest debauchery, which was perfectly consonant with their principles, no people had more the appearance of devotion than the Athenians, who carried the worship of dæmons to such an excess, that they were continually seeking after new divinities, which made a native of the place say, that it was easier to find gods among them than men. When, therefore, the Apostle of the Gentiles came to this famous city, and preached remission of sins through an incarnate Sa-

viour, who suffered death and rose again, that he might bring life and immortality to light, the philosophers supposed that his intention was to recommend some strange deities. But as no foreign idol could be admitted without being first approved by the Areopagus, the Apostle was brought before that court to give an account of himself and his doctrine. There this intrepid advocate of the truth delivered an elegant discourse on the nature and attributes of the Deity, emphatically reproving his auditors for their inordinate desire to multiply the objects of worship, instead of seeking after the true God, the Maker of heaven and earth; "Him, therefore," said he, "whom ye ignorantly worship; him declare I unto you." When the Apostle charged the Athenians with excessive superstition, he was neither guilty of rudeness, nor did they resent the language which he uttered concerning them and their religion. His meaning was this, that, so far from coming thither to increase the number of divinities, he thought they had already more than enough, and that their veneration for dæmons had only served to confirm them in ignorance. As an instance of this, he adduced the circumstance of their having an altar bearing the inscription, "To the unknown God," by which they intended to show their reverence for the deities of other countries, with the names of which they were not acquainted. Nothing certainly could be more preposterous than this, and yet the Athenians were not the only people guilty of that extravagance; for even the Romans, who were more reserved in admitting new divinities among them, did yet, upon some signal calamities, invoke the uncertain deities, from whom they were supposed to issue. The Apostle having justly stated this as a proof that the people whom he addressed had darkened their understandings, by the wrong means which they took to obtain knowledge, proceeded to demonstrate the

power and goodness of God, from a consideration of his works. This argument, together with that of the spirituality of the Divine essence, was destructive of the fashionable systems which, by reducing all actions to absolute necessity and denying a providence, confounded the distinction of virtue and vice, and set at naught the only effectual sanction of morality drawn from the belief of a future state. That there were no such powers as tutelary beings, the Apostle inferred from the harmony of the creation, the descent of all nations from one origin, and the physical uniformity of the human race, in their structure and mental capacity. This sublime view of the Deity obviously led to the subject of idolatry, the absurdity of which is rather glanced at, than formally refuted, in this admirable discourse; because, though the Apostle was by no means disposed to conceal the truth out of fear of the consequences, he knew that in such an assembly as that where he stood, nothing more was requisite than to establish certain principles, and to leave the application of them to his hearers. Aware, however, of an objection which might be urged against the doctrine of the divine unity from the prevalence of polytheism, the preacher admitted the fact, but he made use of it to strengthen his argument, by showing that this was an evidence of the necessity of revelation. He went farther, and maintained that the Almighty had overlooked this long season of ignorance; that men, in their endeavours to grope after divine knowledge, might be convinced of their weakness, and be made sensible, that no efforts of human wisdom could find out God or his ways, the laws by which he is to be served and the sanction of them, in the assurance of a future state of rewards and punishments. All that man could discover was to be seen in this resort of the learned; and yet even there, by their own account, they had been unable to ascertain that

which was the grand object of their inquiries. The time was now come, therefore, for that revelation of the Divine will, of which all men felt the want, by the pains which they took to do homage to the invisible powers, of whose nature, however, they confessed themselves ignorant. The Apostle concluded with maintaining, that the blessing which was so much desired he had it in his power to make known; and that God, who had hitherto suffered idolatry to prevail, now commanded, by the manifestation of the Gospel,* all men every where to repent. That life and immortality had been brought to light, was evident from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the great teacher, who came to destroy the kingdom of darkness, and to lead men into the way of righteousness. This was the important subject which occupied the labours of the Apostle, and the proofs of what he advanced he was ready to adduce; but when the philosophers heard of the resurrection, they were little inclined to pursue the inquiry, and the court broke up without any decision, though the discourse had the effect of converting one of the members and some other persons of distinction. Hence we learn that the light of nature is incapable of guiding men in their duty, and that there is no such thing as a true knowledge of God to be acquired by any other means than in the faith of Jesus Christ or the incarnation of the Divine Word. Let us then show our grateful sense of this inestimable privilege, which elevates the poorest and the meanest among us above the wisest of the heathen world; and while we prize the information which we enjoy, let us show its influence in our lives and conversation, "looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 13, 14.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE CONVERTS OF EPHESUS.

Acts, xix. 19.—*Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.*

WHEN religion takes possession of the mind and affections, its influence is discerned in the change of habits and pursuits, of studies and manners. It does not, indeed, produce an absolute alteration of the natural temperament of the believer, or turn him from those avocations which are purely indifferent; but it corrects his inordinate attachment to worldly things, and enables him to make a complete sacrifice of all objects that are injurious to his spiritual improvement, or of evil tendency to the principles of others. The man who placed all his felicity in the pleasures of sense, becomes moderate in the indulgence of his appetite; and the vanities which were once his supreme delight, no longer afford him any satisfaction. He wonders at the eagerness with which he was wont to seek after trifles, and he is ashamed of those attainments which constituted his leading aim, and perfection in which he regarded as the most distinguished excellence. The time that has been spent in unprofitable acquirements is the subject of serious reflection, but then it is made the occasion of a better management of the portion of life which remains; and thus Divine grace renders the most humiliating circumstances beneficial to the penitent as well as to the church, which is edified by his example. The disciple of Christ considers that he does not live for himself alone, but that, in whatever

sphere he is called to move, some are likely to be affected by his character and conduct. Impressed with this sentiment, he is careful to avoid all things that would give offence, and particularly such as the weak and the wavering, the young and uninformed, may pervert to improper purposes. We have an instructive instance of this Christian spirit, which gives up every favourite pleasure and gainful employment for the sake of the truth, in the sacrifice made by the converts at Ephesus. This city was famous for its temple, erected in honour of Diana ; which, on account of its magnitude, splendour, and ornaments, was reckoned one of the wonders of the world. But what contributed most to spread its fame and to attract visitors from the remotest parts, was an image of that pretended divinity, which her priests made the ignorant worshippers believe had descended from heaven. The possession of this rarity was so highly esteemed by the inhabitants, that almost the whole city was employed in keeping up the imposture, by fabricating representations of the goddess ; and as these figures had the credit of an extraordinary virtue for the protection of those who were silly enough to purchase them, the making of idols became a profitable business at Ephesus. On these accounts the reception of the Gospel in such a place must be accounted as an event little short of miraculous ; for the interest of the city lay in opposing a doctrine which not only tended to undermine a favourite superstition, but with it to destroy a profitable trade. Admitting, therefore, that the Ephesians, by their knowledge of the arts used in deceiving the credulous, were a people likely to hear the Apostle with attention ; yet nothing but a strong conviction of the truth of what he preached could have induced them to relinquish a profession in which their livelihood consisted. In other places ease and reputation were the sacrifices which the

converts had to make for the faith of Christ; but here the belief of a crucified Saviour was attended with the loss of a lucrative concern and the most advantageous connexions. The Gospel, however, made its way even into this mart of idolatry, and among persons whose occupations and interest must have naturally made them jealous of every religious innovation, particularly of one that subverted the whole craft by which they gained their wealth. As a proof of their sincerity, these believers brought the books which contained the mysteries of their profession, and burnt them publicly in the presence of the congregation. These books are supposed by some to have been rules for the performance of magical rites; but it seems more likely that they were such as related to the idolatrous follies peculiar to Ephesus, or to the arts in request among those who were employed in the manufacture of the images and shrines of Diana. But of whatever description these books were, the act of the converts was an unequivocal demonstration of their integrity, and is worthy of the consideration of all who bear the Christian name, teaching them the duty of giving up every pursuit that is inconsistent with the sacred profession to which they are called. Some persons are too apt to fancy that it matters not of what nature their studies or engagements are, provided they do not interfere with the forms of religion. But it may be affirmed, without incurring the charge of being over-scrupulous, that frivolous exercises have at least a tendency to enervate the mind and to draw it gradually off from the love of virtue, although they do not directly corrupt its principles. The reading of trifling books, and the occasional indulgence of vain amusements, must, for the time at least that the impression continues, divert the thoughts from more serious objects; and of this every one must be certain who will examine himself carefully,

and confess the truth ingenuously, that whatever may be said in favour of harmless pleasures, few of those which the world calls so are to be reckoned in the number. The time dissipated, and the powers wasted, in an attention to trifling pursuits, might be devoted to objects, the remembrance of which, with the effects produced by them, would solace the hour of sickness and calm the mind in trouble. We should, therefore, consider well whether the indulgence of our inclinations, or an acquiescence with the solicitations of others, has any tendency to affect the interests of religion, in the way of example; and, particularly, whether such amusements or connexions are likely to draw our minds off from more important concerns: in either of which cases it will become us to say with the Apostle, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." 1 Cor. x. 23.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

CONSPIRACY OF THE JEWS.

Acts, xxiii. 12.—*And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying, that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.*

IT is a lamentable proof of human weakness, that religion should be the instrument of contention, and that a subject which ought to inspire nothing but sentiments of kindness and love, should prove the occasion of enmity and bloodshed. Yet so it is, that while the variety of customs and the opposition of interests are regarded but with little emotion, the slightest shade of difference in speculative opinions will

frequently produce contempt and animosity. Men of mild temper and enlarged principles, in other respects, are sometimes found sadly deficient in that spirit of liberality which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." 1 Cor. xiii. 7. There is a zeal which, like the lambent fire in the mount, sets forth the Divine glory, and edifies mankind without violence; but there is another kind which burns with fury, and, under the false plea of doing God service, commits outrage upon his laws, and spreads devastation over his works. Of this destructive nature was that spirit which actuated the Apostle when he breathed threatenings and slaughter against the church; and of the benevolent principle the remainder of his life afforded an amiable example, confirming his own declaration: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." The ardour which distinguished him before his conversion remained as the characteristic of his temper, when he became a believer; but it was then sanctified to a nobler purpose, and carried him, under the influence of grace, through all his labours for the benefit of his fellow-creatures. He no longer thought that it was a duty to pursue men with rancour on account of their opinions; but he could say, "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." 1 Cor. ix. 19. This generous disposition and exalted conduct, which entitled him to the esteem of all candid and intelligent minds, brought upon him the hatred of his countrymen; and they who formerly admired his talents, and respected him for his virtues, now endeavoured to take away his life. His appearance at Jerusalem, after an absence of some years, produced a commotion among the Jews, who had been informed by their brethren in various parts, of the Apostle's exertions in the propagation of the

Christian faith. He was represented as one that had travelled over Asia for the purpose of subverting the laws of Moses; and this accusation was rendered plausible by his accompanying some Greek converts into the temple. The uproar occasioned by this appeal to the passions and prejudices of the people, obliged the military government to interfere for the restoration of the peace; and by that means the life of this chosen servant was preserved for more extensive and effectual labours in the glorious field to which, by God's grace, he had been called. The circumstance of his being in the care of the Roman soldiers, increased the rage of his adversaries, because it prevented them from taking that summary vengeance which they had formerly inflicted on the martyr Stephen. To accomplish their aim, therefore, in another way, forty of the number, who appear to have been persons of no mean condition, bound themselves together in an infamous covenant, to murder the Apostle, when he should be brought down from the castle to appear before the Sanhedrim. This design, however, was frustrated, apparently, by mere natural means, but secretly by the direction of Providence, that this faithful minister might bear witness to the truth before kings, preach the name of Christ with the demonstration of the Spirit in the centre of the Roman state, and eventually spread the light of the Gospel even to the farthest provinces of that mighty empire. Thus the wickedness of these Jewish zealots was overruled by Supreme wisdom to the accomplishment of the Divine decrees for the benefit of remote nations and distant ages. But the iniquity of the confederates was not the less, because a superior power prevented them from carrying their abominable purpose into execution. They might, indeed, as many have done since, attempt to justify the project on the ground of a concern for the support of religion, and the necessity of adopting extraordinary means to secure the common-

wealth. All such pleas, however, are aggravations of guilt; for God is not to be served by the violation of his laws; and they who think to do him honour by destroying their fellow-creatures, or doing injury to their reputation, will find in the great day of account that they have trampled upon his ordinances, and committed the most heinous rebellion against his authority. Conscience is the peculiar seat of the Divine government, over which man has no right to exercise any control; and even where the principles are most egregiously enormous, the punishment of those who are unhappy enough to be misled by them belongs not to any human jurisdiction. As, therefore, all mortals are liable to be deceived, even with the best means of information in their hands, the duty of every man is to have humble views of himself, and charitable opinions of other persons, "endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace." Ephes. iv. 3.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

Acts, xxiv. 25.—*And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

ONE of the most ridiculous objections brought against the Christian religion, is the pretence that it debases the spirits of men, and incapacitates them for heroic actions. It has been said, that in proportion as this faith predominates, the mind becomes limid and void of all energy, except in an intolerant zeal for the propagation of speculative opinions. The fallacy of this accusation might be easily proved by an examination of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel;

but a more effectual way of refuting the calumny is by referring to the example of the Redeemer, and the conduct of his disciples. The courage of our Lord was manifested in his opposition to corruptions, and in encountering difficulties, without taking any steps to avoid danger, or to soften the resentment of his adversaries. His followers were distinguished by a similar fortitude: for they went forth armed with nothing but faith and a good conscience, to preach the Gospel, in opposition to the prejudices of the Jew and the superstition of the Gentile. In this course they neither spared error nor vice, but combated the one without reserve, and exposed the other in all its deformity. Of this zeal and fidelity we have a remarkable instance in the behaviour of St. Paul, when he stood at the bar of Felix, the Roman governor. The advocate who was employed to manage the prosecution, addressed the judge in a strain of fulsome adulation, complimenting him on account of his worthy deeds, and expressing the satisfaction which the people felt under his administration; when, at the same time, the venal orator knew that Felix had been guilty of the most abominable practices, and that the people hated him for his exactions. Very different was the language of the prisoner; for though he was aware that his life lay at the mercy of this unprincipled magistrate, he scorned to purchase it at the expense of truth. Instead of courting the good opinion of his judge by flattering his conduct or his understanding, the Apostle contented himself with a narrative of facts, and challenging his accusers to deny, if they could, any part of what he related. The silence of these men was a sufficient confirmation of all that was stated in the defence; but such was the corruption of the governor, that he continued the Apostle in custody under the pretext of giving him another hearing. Shortly after this, Felix, and his wife Drusilla, sent for Paul, that they might learn

from him some particulars of the religion which he professed. Curiosity was the only motive by which these persons were actuated, for they were both too deeply sunk in guilt to make any inquiry after truth with the serious intention of profiting by the search. All that they wanted, was to amuse a vacant hour, in which respect Felix and Drusilla were not unlike some nominal Christians, who hear the Word, or study it in books; not that it may beget in them good desires and pious resolutions, but that their itching ears may be pleased with something new. One so well acquainted with human nature as the Apostle, could not well be deceived in the purposes of his hearers; but, favourable as the opportunity was, of ingratiating himself into their good opinion, he would not take an advantage of it, but readily entered upon the subject for which he was called into their presence. He stated the evidences of Christianity as comprised in the history of its Divine Author; but he did not rest in a general view of the Gospel, or out of respect to his auditors, and a tender regard to his own safety, disguise the principles of religion. The Apostle, who knew how to preach in season and out of season, reasoned upon "righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come," which were topics exactly suited to the circumstances of the audience: for Felix, in his public capacity, was not more infamous on account of his extortion, than he was in his private life for his licentiousness and debauchery: nor was the character of Drusilla more amiable than that of her partner; for, notwithstanding her education in the Jewish religion, and her rank, as the daughter of Herod Agrippa, she had abandoned her lawful husband, Azizus, king of the Emesenes, to live with Felix. Such were the persons before whom St. Paul was called to explain the doctrines of Christ, which he did without reserve; reasoning, first, upon "righteousness," as the foundation of all religion, being the rule of our obe-

dience both to God and man. Without justice there can be no true faith; and he who is insincere in his dealings with his fellow-creatures, may pretend to venerate the Almighty, but his reverence is hypocrisy, and his devotion no better than affectation or superstition. The Apostle reasoned upon this comprehensive article as it applied to the several branches of morality; and the effect of his arguments was such, that Felix, the unrighteous governor, "trembled." But the preacher went farther, and reasoned also upon "temperance," comprising the virtues of sobriety and chastity in the government of the mind, the regulation of the passions, and the direction of the conduct. As he dilated upon this head, he no doubt showed the affinity between all the duties belonging to temperance, and that righteousness which extends to the affections and thoughts, no less than to the words and the actions of men. Well, therefore, might the vicious governor feel the force of this representation; and on comparing it with the depravity of his life, be shocked at the contrast, and fearful of the consequences. But if he was moved by the reasoning of the Apostle upon these searching truths, how much more must he have been affected when he heard that this life is only preparatory to another; that every man has a trust to manage, for the discharge of which he will be called to a strict account, when no plea will excuse his crimes; nor any guards be found to protect him from punishment! The conscience of Felix told him that the judgment which he heard described would assuredly visit him for the public and private enormities of which he had been guilty; and he trembled in the prospect. But he could endure no more; the terrors of the last day brought to his remembrance all his iniquities, and made him shrink from the dreadful gulph which opened wide and deep to receive his polluted spirit. Felix was convinced of the certainty of what he heard predicted from the faithfulness of the

picture which had been drawn of his evil disposition and sinful course of life. Proud and vengeful as he was in his temper, habituated to flattery, and steeped in sensuality, this man could not defend himself from the force of truth, which pierced his inmost soul, roused against him all his thoughts, and made him tremble before one who was his prisoner. The only means he had of quieting his perturbed mind was by dismissing the monitor whose doctrine awakened such painful sensations. Felix, it seems, cut short the discourse when it became too powerful for his feelings; and he said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee." The pleasures of dissipation, and the gaiety of a court, soon dispelled the apprehensions which had been excited by the Apostle, who was kept in confinement because he either had not the means, or would not stoop to purchase an acquittal by a bribe. Thus the conviction, which, properly cherished, might have led to saving repentance, was obliterated, and the last state of Felix became worse than the first. The same will be the case, it is to be feared, with all who, like him, put off the concerns of religion to a convenient season, which seldom or never comes; because they who so trifle with the offer of grace, always find, in the hurry of the world, its cares and its vanities, some excuse for delaying that which ought to be the primary object of their attention. The "convenient season" is with such persons the time of sickness, when the thoughts are disturbed; or the period of old age, when the mind is enfeebled, and incapable of recollection; or the hour of death, when even the most pious require spiritual comfort, and all the aid of experienced principles to support their sinking spirits. Let us, then, be wise, while we have the means of grace in our power; and as we would avoid the fate of Felix, let us make the resolution of the Apostle the daily rule of our conduct; "Herein do I exercise myself, to have al-

ways a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards man."

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-NINTH.

CONFESSION OF AGRIPPA.

Acts, xxvi. 28.—Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

IT is a dreadful thing when a man makes an enemy of himself by stifling convictions, which, properly improved, would lead to repentance and tranquillity. We have just seen an instance of this in the behaviour of Felix, who shut his ears against the voice of conscience, and put off a subject that alarmed his apprehensions, to a convenient season, which never came. The same history presents us with another case no less striking, in the deportment of one who was also actuated by a spirit of curiosity to know something of the Christian religion, and to witness the eloquence of its distinguished preacher. Agrippa, the son of that Herod who persecuted the church, and died by the visitation of Providence, being desirous of hearing St. Paul, with whose story he was partly acquainted, Festus, the successor of Felix, caused the Apostle to be brought before him in the court of Caesarea. Thus was fulfilled the declaration made at the conversion of this eminent luminary of the church: "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Agrippa had been brought up in the Jewish customs, so that he was extremely conversant in the opinions of the different sects, on the interpretation of the law, and the application of the prophecies. The Apostle, therefore, gladly embraced this opportunity of proving the divine mission of our Lord in the presence of so intelli-

gent a person, who knew the Scriptures, and believed their authority. Considering the nature of the subject, and the prejudices of the audience, it required uncommon address to manage the argument without giving offence; and if the discourse be examined attentively, it will be found equally powerful and delicate, pathetic and convincing. The apologist began with an account of himself and his education, the manner of his life and the course of his studies, the whole of which tended to show that he was neither an ignorant enthusiast, nor an obscure fanatic, who was easily deceived himself, and eager to inflame others. But to satisfy his hearers that he was not one who took up his religion without sufficient grounds, he proceeded to state the vehemence of his zeal against innovations, and the warmth of his attachment to the national institutions. It is impossible for language to exceed the description which the Apostle gave of the violent manner in which he persecuted the followers of Christ, compelling them to blaspheme the holy name by which they were called, and so outrageously furious against all who professed this faith, as to hunt them out with sanguinary malice, even in strange cities. This was the account which the speaker gave of his early principles and conduct; from which it was natural to infer that his conversion must have been attended with some extraordinary circumstances, since it was evident, that no worldly motives could have effected a change which had brought the subject of it into poverty and bonds. It is observable, however, that before St. Paul entered upon this part of his narrative, he reminded Agrippa of that which constituted the great object of national hope, the promise of the Messiah. This course was indispensibly necessary, because the sole question between the prisoner and his persecutors turned upon that article; the one being ready to lay down his life in attestation of the truth that the promise was fulfilled, and the others

seeking to destroy him for preaching Jesus as the anointed Saviour. The Apostle having thus stated the point at issue between himself and his adversaries, proceeded to relate the particulars of his conversion, and the commission which he had received from Heaven to make the Gospel known to the Gentiles. This history, no doubt, appeared marvellous to many who heard it ; but Agrippa was too well read in the sacred books to deny the possibility of the transaction, and too liberal to express any doubt of the veracity of one who had given such manifest proofs of his ability and integrity. But the Apostle did not rest his cause on the supernatural manner in which he had been brought to the knowledge of the truth. He appealed to those divine records with which the king was well acquainted, for the certainty of the doctrine, that before the kingdom of the Messiah should be established, he must himself suffer death, and be raised again. To this Agrippa made no reply, which he unquestionably would have done had he been able to invalidate what St. Paul affirmed, either with respect to the resurrection of Jesus, or the predictions of the Scriptures. Festus, however, who was a heathen, could not restrain his emotions, or conceal his incredulity, when he heard that one who died on the cross had risen again from the grave by his own power. The governor, with a good-natured levity, treated the narration as a madman's dream, and complimented the learning of Paul at the expense of his understanding. But the Apostle, who knew how to behave with dignity in chains and affliction, replied, " I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and soberness." He even turned this interruption to the advantage of his cause, by appealing from the judgment of the governor to the better instructed mind of Agrippa. The Apostle maintained, in the presence of this assembly, that the things which he had related of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, were

facts so generally known, that the king could not be ignorant of them. But the intrepid apologist urged the matter home more closely, by showing that the particulars of the life and character of Jesus corresponded with the predictions contained in the holy oracles; whence it followed, that if those Scriptures were to be depended upon, the authority of Christ was placed beyond all doubt. The Apostle, therefore, boldly put the question to his illustrious auditor: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" and without waiting for an answer, he immediately added, by one of those happy strokes of natural eloquence which the consciousness of truth alone inspires, "I know that thou believest." This was neither an artful compliment on the part of the orator, who stood in a situation which rendered it dangerous to trifle with the feelings of his auditors, nor was the answer which it received an ironical effusion of contempt; and Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The words of the king were of grave import, and expressive of the effect which the discourse had made upon his mind, inclining him to entertain favourable sentiments of the Gospel, though he wanted firmness to pursue the train of thought to a proper conclusion. That the reply of Agrippa amounted to a candid acknowledgement of his good opinion of what he had heard, is plain, from the noble exclamation which finished the conference. And Paul said, "I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were not only almost, but altogether, such as I am, except these bonds!" Had Agrippa felt any thing like dissatisfaction at the freedom of Paul, or had he been able to deny what was so confidently advanced, he would have expressed his resentment in direct terms; but, at all events, he would not have said, as he afterwards did, "This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Cæsar." This declaration is a proof that the answer

to the Apostle was an ingenuous confession resulting from a feeling of the truth, and not a sarcastic observation. Agrippa admitted the facts reported of Christ, because they were public transactions, and notoriously known all over the country; he therefore would not call in question the representation which had been given of them: nor was it in his power to deny that the books which he believed to be the revelation of God, contained the predictions to which Paul referred. Thus far, then, this prince was willing enough to go; and so far, even his testimony is of importance; but beyond this he was afraid to venture: for the pomp and vanity of this world, its honours, friendship, and pleasures, were too mighty and fascinating to be sacrificed on the altar of truth. Agrippa stands not alone in this respect; for his character is a very common one, even in an age when the belief of the Gospel is neither attended with pain nor peril. Many persons will readily express their naked assent to the doctrines of Christ, and their approbation of his precepts: but when they are called to mortify their passions and to moderate their desires, to bear the cross before all the world, and to live as becomes the disciples of a suffering Redeemer, they are uneasy, and disposed to find some excuse for disobedience; to consider their case as an exception to the general rule; and to plead, that what was enjoined in the infancy of the church, is no longer required in the present state of society. This may be a very admissible plea for a conformity to the world, in the estimation of those who are unwilling to lay themselves under the restraint of any morality that does not bend to human explication. But whatever such persons may think or profess, they, and all who act like them, are no better than "almost Christians;" and we know who hath said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." Luke, xi. 23.

DECEMBER THE THIRTIETH.

SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

Acts, xxviii. 2.—And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness; for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

THE Apostle of the Gentiles having been compelled to make an appeal from the malice of his countrymen to the justice of the Roman emperor, was put under the care of a centurion named Julius, with whom he embarked for Italy. Thus the violence of men was instrumental in bringing about the purposes of God; and they who thought to have hindered the progress of the Gospel, became the means of giving it a wider circulation. The chosen messenger had already gone through a variety of troubles by land, and now he was called to suffer "perils in the sea." This is an exact picture of the Christian life, which is never in one stay; and he that enters on the important course must expect to encounter many changes and chances, as the exercise of his faith and the trial of his patience. At the outset of the voyage the Apostle warned the centurion of the danger that would attend it, and advised him to winter in the island of Crete; but the opinion of the master and owner of the ship prevailed over that of Paul, who was probably regarded as an officious meddler in a business to which, by his studies and profession, he was an utter stranger. Here we perceive how liable men are to err when they take worldly wisdom for their guide, in preference to that counsel which cometh from God. Though the centurion had a great respect for his prisoner, he thought it safest to rely upon the judgment and experience of those who

were practised in the navigation of that sea. But even this turned to good; for when the event confirmed the prediction, the character of the Apostle rose in the estimation of the whole company, who treated his advice with implicit obedience at a time when, but for his fortitude and prudence, they would all have perished. It merits our observation also, that while the Divine agency controuled and directed the several parties and incidents in this concern, for the protection of St. Paul, every thing appeared to be merely casual, and natural means only were adopted to bring him safely out of all his difficulties. This teaches us, while we place our absolute dependence upon the goodness of Providence in the various exigencies of life, to exert the faculties which God hath given us, and to employ all the lawful helps that can be obtained, with promptitude and vigour. When all hope of saving the vessel was at an end, the crew secretly plotted to make their escape in the boat, thus cruelly leaving the passengers to their fate. Aware of this wicked design, Paul gave an intimation of it to the centurion and his soldiers, who having learned to reverence the monitor from the experience which they had of his foresight, profited by his caution, and hindered the mariners from accomplishing their purpose. But it is strange, that the same men who were indebted for their own lives to the watchfulness and humanity of the Apostle, should have been so sanguinary as to form the resolution of destroying the prisoners lest any of them should escape. We are told, that in earthquakes and inundations, beasts of prey lose their fierceness, and that, in the sense of common danger, they will mingle among herds of cattle, without offering to molest any of them; but these soldiers, who had death before them, would have imbrued their hands in the blood of the helpless, if they had not been forcibly restrained by the authority of their commander. The contrast between this

savage ferocity and the uniform tenderness of St. Paul, affords an admirable illustration of the blessed change produced by that Gospel, of which he was the bearer among the Gentiles. Whatever may be the licentiousness and cruelty of modern times, they bear no proportion to the brutal horrors which marked the progress of the Roman arms. Every act of violence and tyranny which occurs among the professors of Christianity is in violation of the fundamental doctrines and precepts of their faith; but the public atrocities of the ancient conquerors, and even their private vices, were the result of their principles. Of this we have a proof in the case before us; for though Julius kept his men from their project, we are told that his motive in so doing was not from any sense of its wickedness, but from a particular desire which he had to save the life of St. Paul. Yet the disposition of this officer was amiable; and, no doubt, the soldiers themselves were of opinion that the measure which they proposed was an act of duty imposed upon them by the nature of their situation. No one, however, can compare the stern severity of the Roman yoke with the amenity of Christian manners, and not perceive the vast advantages which have accrued to mankind from the sway of the King of righteousness. The ancient world, indeed, was far from being deficient in many substantial virtues, of which hospitality to strangers was not the least. The present history affords a beautiful instance of this in the conduct of the islanders to the crew and passengers of this ship. Instead of looking out for a wreck with savage joy, that they might seize upon the property, the barbarians, as they are called by the historian, not out of disrespect, but according to the phraseology of the Greeks, hastened to the shore, that they might be ready to assist the sufferers. Though these people were unacquainted with the arts of polished life, they felt sentiments of compassion for the distresses of others, and behaved

on this occasion with remarkable courtesy, receiving all with equal kindness, and immediately kindling a fire for their accommodation, "because of the present rain and because of the cold." It is plain from this, that the place where the disaster happened was remote from any human habitation; and this incident serves to show, still more strongly, the considerate humanity of the inhabitants, who so readily quitted their domestic comforts, on an inclement wintry day, not to enrich themselves, but to bestow all the relief which lay in their power upon the helpless and the miserable. But it is observable, that these people had a strong sense of religion, according to their rude conceptions; for, perceiving a viper fastening itself on the hand of the Apostle, they concluded that "this man was a murderer, whom, though he had escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffered not to live." Simple as this idea was, and unjust in its application, it showed that the inhabitants of Melita were believers in a retributive Providence; but they fell into an error, which was very common in those times, that extraordinary calamities are marks of the Divine displeasure, as singular deliverances are of peculiar sanctity. This mistake was natural enough among nations who were without the light of revelation, and but imperfectly acquainted with second causes. But in us, such an opinion is worse than a speculative error; for it is injurious to God's moral government, and destructive of the private and social virtues. The mutable nature of popular judgment was evinced in the behaviour of these islanders, who, finding that no harm had happened to the object of their suspicion, changed their sentiments; and, as ignorance always runs to extremes, they became persuaded that he must be a divinity. The Apostle himself was neither elated by their admiration, nor moved by their censure. He pitied them equally for both; and he repaid them for their kindness to himself and his companions by performing

many miraculous cures; but, above all, by making them acquainted with the tidings of salvation. Thus, the raging tempest which buried the merchant's treasures in the deep, conveyed the joyful sound of grace to the inhabitants of this isle, who, for a little tenderness, benevolence, and liberality, were rewarded with the permanent riches of eternal life, affording a practical illustration of the apostolic counsel, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Heb. xiii. 2.

DECEMBER THE THIRTY-FIRST.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

Acts, xxviii. 30, 31.—*And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

WHEN the disciples expressed their surprize that our Lord should think of returning to Judea, where he had lately been in imminent danger of his life from the malevolence of his enemies, he replied, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" By this observation the Divine Instructor intended to convince his followers that every good work has its allotted period, in which the faithful servant must employ himself with diligence, according to the grace that he hath received, without any fear of the consequences. Time is that talent which is given to every man to profit withal for the improvement of his own mind, and the benefit of his fellow-creatures. But the longest portion that we can be favoured with in this probationary state is of contracted limits; and when compared with boundless

duration, is far more insignificant than a span. The nature and extent of our various duties we know, but the time allowed for the performance of them is uncertain; it may end to-day, or it may be yet prolonged for many years to come; in either case, however, there are several things to be done, and virtues to be acquired; with this only difference, that as the sphere widens, and the opportunities of improvement are multiplied, our obligations increase in proportion, and the larger will be the account which we shall have to make up against the day of reckoning. It will be wise, then, for every person to consider this life as the appointed day of his labour, which period, like that of the husbandman and mechanic, has its appropriate divisions for work and refreshment. There are proper hours or seasons for both purposes, which, duly attended to, will be productive of present comfort and future advantage, the satisfaction of our own minds, and the benefit of those with whom we are connected. The remark of our Saviour undoubtedly turns upon this point, and was designed to show that there must be a regularity observed in our actions and enjoyments, both with regard to time and place, corresponding to those duties which are called for by the wants of the body at particular parts of the day. Our Lord exemplified this principle throughout the whole of his own conduct: for he went continually about doing good, never wasting any of his valuable time in unprofitable discourse or idle pursuits, in an indolent attention to the concerns of others, or the discussion of useless questions. His uniform rule was this: "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work:" and, in making this assertion, he had an eye to the immediate instruction of those who were to follow him, and to the edification of the church, which was to be founded upon his faith, and to be directed by his example. Accordingly, we find the disciples acting constantly upon the same divine

principle; and the history of St. Paul, which is more detailed than that of his brethren, is an instance how they all deported themselves in the respective districts where the Holy Spirit called them to labour. When this Apostle came to Rome, his first consideration was to inform the heads of the synagogue of his arrival, and to make them acquainted with the particular reasons of his appealing from the jurisdiction of the council at Jerusalem, as well as from that of the government at Cæsarea. In this he acted with that noble candour which distinguished him upon all occasions; and with the same integrity he laid before the principal persons of his nation the evidences of Christianity; proving, from the prophecies, that Jesus was the Messiah. But his preaching was not attended with much effect on those auditors who came to hear what he had to say respecting the sect which was every where spoken against: for though some believed, it is evident, from the language of the Apostle himself, that his word was more favourably received by the Gentiles than by his own countrymen. This blindness of the Jews, however, was so far from discouraging the blessed servant of Jesus, that it only served to quicken his zeal: for he continued daily to expound the things belonging to the kingdom of God, during the whole space of two years, in which he lay under arrest, waiting for the imperial decision of his cause. He did not employ that time in drawing up memorials to procure his release, or in making interest with the persons who came out of curiosity to see him; but, leaving his fate in the hands of that Being by whose providence he had been conducted to the heart of the empire, he set himself, with all diligence, to the discharge of his office as the minister of Christ, not knowing how long he might be permitted to live, or to exercise the privilege of receiving the inquirers after truth in his own hired house. Such was the conduct of the Apostle; from

which we may learn how to estimate the value of time, and in what manner we should use the important trust which has been committed to our management. St. Paul was ignorant of the consequences of his appeal, and of what would befall him after his arrival at Rome; yet, so far was this from abating his ardour, that it made him redouble his exertions. We also are unacquainted with the purposes of God concerning us, the years that we have to live, and the trials to which we shall be called; but, of this we may be assured, that as Infinite Wisdom hath marked the boundaries of our habitation, and numbered all our days, so will Divine grace sanctify our gifts if we rightly use them for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. The two years of toleration which Paul enjoyed at Rome, were of great importance to the service in which he was engaged; for, under this sanction, he took care to preach with all confidence, so that his hired house became a place of general resort to the serious and inquisitive of every description. They who heard the Gospel reported it to others, according to the impression which it had made upon their own minds; and thus, as the number of inquirers multiplied, the knowledge of Christ was diffused, not only over the city, but to distant parts of that extensive empire. Let this encourage us to make use of every opportunity that lies in our power to convey instruction in the best things to those who want it; for, though we may not see its immediate effects, the word spoken may take deep root downward, and, at a future period, bear much fruit upward when we are mouldered into dust. From this example of the Apostle, then, we may derive confidence without being presumptuous; for it teaches us, while we rely upon the Sovereign Disposer of all things for a blessing on our labours, to be industrious and prudent in the choice and use of proper means in due season. Every man, however low he

may be in the world, has it in his power to do some good by his influence and diligence, the regularity of his life, and the piety of his conversation. The poor and ignorant are, in fact, instructing their superiors, while they are seeking, with all humility, for Divine counsel, and waiting upon the Lord in the courts of his house. No excuse, therefore, can justly be pleaded by any persons for neglecting the advantages of religion, and despising the only opportunities that will be offered them for the attainment of eternal life. The man who squanders in folly the inheritance of his fathers, is sure to bring upon himself more contempt than pity; though it is possible that such a spendthrift may afterwards profit by his extravagance, and become a useful member of society. But he who wastes his time and dissipates his faculties, throws away treasures that never can be recovered or made up, and the loss of which will expose him to the incessant scorn of those evil spirits whose arts have misled him into perdition; thus confirming the strong assertion of an acute observer of human life: "If it is imaginable that there can be any misery greater than damnation, it is this, to be damned for being a fool." Let it, then, be our immediate care and resolution to redeem the time that has been mispent by the diligent husbandry of the means of grace which are yet offered for our improvement; and let the remainder of our days be so employed as to render us joyful spectators of that august spectacle which will terminate the business of this world, and put an eternal period to all our trials and labours, sufferings and probation. "I saw," says the prophet, "another mighty angel come down from heaven, with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. And he set his right foot in the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice as when a lion roareth; and when he cried, seven thunders uttered

their voices. And he lift up his hand to heaven, and sware by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things that are therein, that there should be time no longer." Rev. x. 1—6.

THE END.

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